

SIGHT & SOUND

INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY · AUTUMN 1990 · £2.00 · \$3.95



NICHOLAS RAY
ON DIRECTING

LINDSAY ANDERSON
ON MARY ASTOR

JAMES IVORY
ON SPIDERS



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SIGHT & SOUND

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On the cover: John Gielgud in Peter Greenaway's 'Prospero's Books'.
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Paul Grimault's *Le Roi et l'Oiseau*.

PAUL GRIMAULT

An animated life

Advertising agencies are famous for harbouring talented but impecunious artists, often unwittingly. Few in history, however, can have been so blessed as the Parisian *agence de publicité* Damour, which in 1930 numbered among its employees no fewer than four future luminaries of the French artistic scene: Jean Anouilh, Jean Aurenche, Jacques Prévert and Paul Grimault.

Not that the agency was aware of its fortune. Prévert after several weeks was sacked for incompetence. The management, it appears, doubted his mastery of the French idiom: he wasn't 'witty enough' for advertising. Such, at any event, is the story according to his colleague Paul Grimault, the veteran cartoonist (85 years old) who was in London in June as a guest of the Institut Français, where he showed a number of his classic animations and reminisced about an adventurous life.

At one stage or another he seems to have met everybody. As a member of the surrealist 'Groupe Octobre' during the 1930s, he was on intimate terms not only with Jacques Prévert (his future script collaborator) and Prévert's brother Pierre, but also such legendary figures as Ernst, Leiris, Buñuel and Breton. A passionate cinephile long before it became fashionable to be one, he joined Henri

Langlois in the mid-1930s in collecting copies of the classic silent films threatened by neglect or decay (a collection which later formed the basis of the Cinémathèque Française).

During one of these researches he happened upon the ageing Georges Méliès—alive (if only just) and eking out existence in an old people's home. It was a matter of honour to organise a retrospective of that filmmaker's precious oeuvre, held—to acclaim—in the old man's presence. Later on (all this recited quite modestly), there were meetings with Disney, Picasso and Trinka, each issuing in appropriate anecdotes. It was a pleasure in itself to listen to Grimault's old-school French delivery—articulate, passionate and courteous—as he unburdened himself of his memories.

Between the sessions of talk, chaired by the Institute's resident film expert Eric Simon, the audience was able to watch Grimault's past works of animation. A number have been collected and edited by Jacques Demy (a former protégé) into a feature-length compilation, *La Table Tournante*. Presented chronologically, these 'mini-films' within the main film offered a fascinating record of the evolution of one animator's art over the last half century, from black and white line drawing, through earliest experiments in colour, to today's all-colour computer-aided techniques.

What characterises each film right from the start (as it characterises the work of someone like

Richard Williams today) is the dreamlike ability to capture the fluidity of the human body, its propensity to fly, float, metamorphose into amazing shapes. Such kinetic-oneiric aspects of the craft, and what goes with them, a fascination with heights, a mastery of perspective, are present in the purest degree in Grimault's work. One can see he is a natural, like Disney.

Yet he is more sardonic than the Hollywood master, more of a genuine surrealist. A film like *L'Epouvantail* (*The Scarecrow*, 1943), ostensibly innocent and family-oriented, as all Grimault's films are, touches regions of darkness that Hollywood only rarely alights on. Maybe it is the result of primitive colour techniques with their now non-existent half-tones of orange, mauve and brown, but Grimault's films, even the jolliest ones, all seem cast under the sable emblem of melancholy.

In England, Grimault is best known for his full-length feature *Le Roi et l'Oiseau* (*The King and the Bird*), released here a decade ago, unfortunately with a dubbed American soundtrack that ruined Prévert's fine poetic dialogue. In fact, the film's history is exemplary of the difficulties which animators face in bringing a private vision in front of a large general audience. Begun in 1947 in an atmosphere of enthusiasm, it made a first, truncated appearance in 1953 under the title *La Bergère et le Ramoneur* (*The Shepherdess and the Chimneysweep*), only to be rejected by the public.

Feeling that the film had not been given its due, Grimault bought back the negative from the distributors in 1963 and with the help of an ageing Prévert worked up half of the original into a new story, using in the process, in order to achieve a seamless match of image, techniques that had lain dormant for 30 years or more. The result is an extraordinary work of art, both modern and dateless, by turns violent, sarcastic and sweetly tender.

MARK LE FANU

IRAN

The fundamental things apply

Some of the freshest, most distinctive work in the cinema today is coming unexpectedly from Iran. The theocratic state tolerates neither sex nor gratuitous violence in its cinema, while criticism of the eight-year war with Iraq, of the mullahs or of Islam itself is unthinkable. But in focusing on recent Iranian cinema, this year's Pesaro film festival highlighted the fact that strict censorship has induced its filmmakers to proceed by indirections. Modern Iranian movies do speak eloquently about the undercurrents in that troubled land, but obliquely, in metaphors.

Take Dariush Mehrjui, the director in the pre-1979 revolutionary era of *The Cow* and *The Cycle*. His 1986 film *The Lodgers* looks like a capitulation to box-office pressures. A broad comedy about a scandalously decrepit old property, it draws its humour from burst pipes, cracked walls, crumbling plaster and a tenant who sings grand opera to the flowers on his roof garden to promote growth. Commercially it hit the jackpot in Iran, taking \$2.6 million in Tehran alone.

But *The Lodgers* is not quite the simple farce it seems to be. Its tumbledown property (with an absentee owner) is being deliberately run down by one of the tenants, who has proclaimed himself the landlord's legal representative. It's like Rachmanism revisited—a familiar tale of 'winkling', threatened eviction orders and corruption. As in the recent Russian film *Fountain*, you can, if you wish, see in this rickety property a symbol of all that needs mending in Iran.

Some directors have done their best work in the form of fables for children. The Institute for the Intellectual Development for Children and Young Adults has been a surprisingly generous source of funds for film-making. Amir Naderi's *The Runner* was produced under its aegis and

several other films of considerable merit, including Ebrahim Foruzesh's *The Key* and Bahram Beizai's *Bashu*, *The Little Stranger*.

The Key is both an instructional picture, teaching young children what to do if they find themselves in a domestic crisis while mother is out shopping, and an allegory of freedom. Four-year-old Amir Mohammad is left to take care of his baby brother and keep an eye on the cooking but soon lets the food burn and the baby crawl into danger. Can he dislodge the spare key from the hook just beyond his reach and open the door to help and safety? Foruzesh's film, a concentrated 76-minute cliff-hanger, has something of the intensity of Bresson. In its unadorned simplicity, the last shot, in which Amir Mohammad, successful at last, unlocks the door, recalls the end of *Un Condamné à Mort s'est Echappé*.

Bashu, *The Little Stranger* sounds like Disney but proves to be a heartening saga of prejudice overcome. Bashu sees his mother incinerated before his eyes in an air raid. Fleeing far from the front, he is taken in by Nai, who is struggling to bring up her family in rural Iran while her husband is away looking for work. But Bashu is black and speaks another tongue. Is he human or an animal? Intolerance runs high in Nai's village. But slowly, as in Truffaut's *Enfant Sauvage*, contact is made, respect established. One would call it humanist, though that is not, perhaps, a term that an Islamic fundamentalist would recognise.

Bashu is an implicitly anti-war film, but *Marriage of the Blessed* by Mohsen Makhmalbaf is one of relatively few Iranian films to show the stark consequences of the eight-year hostilities with Iraq. Much of it is set in a hospital for the shell-shocked, where gibbering inmates 'fire' their crutches like machine guns, suffer hallucinations and scream at the rat-a-tat sound of a typewriter. Makhmalbaf shows what Huston dared not show in *Let There Be Light*.

The opportunity to see virtually the complete works of Amir Naderi confirms him as the most imaginative of contemporary Iranian film-makers—a miniaturist with an almost Chekhovian grasp of mood and atmosphere. Few of his films exceed 75 minutes, some are as short as 45. In *The Harmonica* (1974), a model short story based on the director's childhood memories, a rich boy exploits his companions by allowing them to play his harmonica in return for piggy-back rides through the

town. But in the end, even a worm will turn...

TheAwaiting is a remarkable short film depicting the onset of puberty in a young boy sent by his parents every day to fetch ice, which is passed to him through a half-open door by a woman's hand. In his imagination it seems to be beckoning him on to pleasures he can only half comprehend. The film carries a potent sexual charge without a hint of prurience.

Naderi's latest film, *Water, Wind, Sand*, is his most poetic to date—a near documentary study, in the tradition of Robert Flaherty, of a boy's journey through a howling sand storm in search of his missing parents. Along with all the inhabitants of the region, they have pulled out when the lake dried up, leaving only the skeletons of dead fish like creatures of the moon. It's the bleakest picture yet seen from post-revolutionary Iran. Naderi made it in 1986 for Iranian television, which sat on it for three years. This was not the first time that one of his works had trouble finding an audience. His earlier film about the Iran-Iraq war (*The Search II*) has not been released to this day. Discouraged, Naderi has now left Iran and lives in New York.

The Iranian government has ways of ensuring that films it does not wish to encourage remain unseen. Television can buy up the rights in a picture and leave it in the vaults unshown. Or the system of classification may keep it off the screens. All films distributed in Iran are placed into one of four cate-

gories, of which the first ensures the widest exposure in a country with too few cinemas for its size—some 300 for a population of 51¼ million.

Nominally classification is intended to benefit the local film industry, since no foreign film can be rated higher than B, which means that it will reach fewer cinemas than domestic films. But in practice the system is a way of regulating Iranian films so that those of which the government disapproves can stay on the shelf for years, allegedly for want of a suitable cinema.

ALAN STANBROOK

KARLOVY VARY

Czechoslovakia's 'new look' festival

This was the 'liberated festival', technically the 27th to be held at Karlovy Vary, but, as the programme bluntly put it, 'the first held in a free and democratic country'. A biennial event, Karlovy Vary alternates with the Moscow festival (or has done so up to now), so it was particularly fortuitous that in this of all years it should be the Czechoslovaks' turn. The cultural and political importance of the event was underlined by a visit from Vaclav Havel, which generated far more excitement than an appearance by Robert De Niro.

Although there was much talk of the future, both for the film industry and the festival (Should it become an annual event? Should it move to Prague?), the

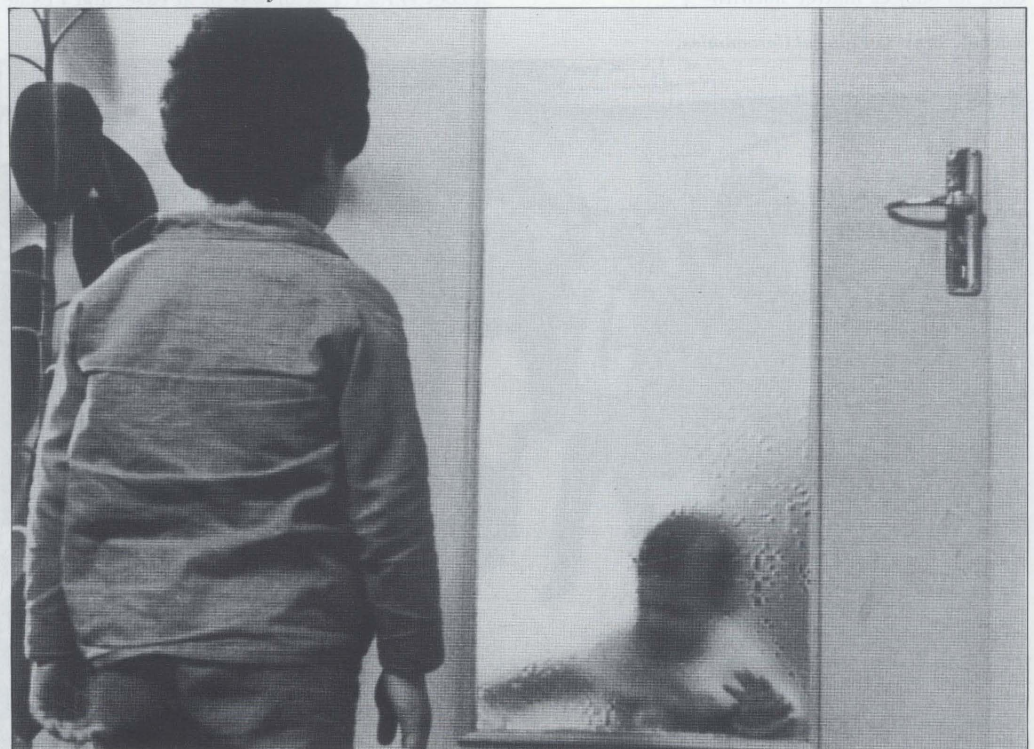
highlight was undoubtedly the superb retrospective of Czechoslovak films. This included sections devoted to banned and blacklisted films, the 'Top Ten' from the 1960s, the work of filmmakers in exile and an amazing array of documentaries and newsreels covering events since 1918. In particular, there was remarkable footage of the 1968 invasion, some of it shot by Jan Němec.

By comparison, the films in competition were pretty disappointing. It may be that there was simply not enough time properly to organise a 'new look' festival freed from what the programme called 'political manipulation and hypocritical slogans', or 'power influences and behind-the-scenes practices'; or perhaps there just aren't enough good new films to go round.

Whatever the case, as a member of the FIPRESCI (International Federation of Film Critics) jury, I found myself wondering if I could really vote for anything at all. In the event, there was a clear first choice—*Birds, Orphans and Fools* by the Slovak director Juraj Jakubisko, although, significantly, this was actually made in 1969. (Furthermore, the director has recently virtually remade it as *Flying High*.) The festival jury, headed by Lindsay Anderson, declined to award its main accolade, the Crystal Globe, to any film.

Both juries singled out the retrospective, and especially the banned and blacklisted section, for prizes. We also chose one particular film as representative:

Ebrahim Foruzesh's *The Key*.



Zdenek Sirovy's *Funeral Ceremonies*, which examines, on a personal level, the effects of the imposition of collective farming (a recurrent theme in many of the banned films) in the 1950s. A reworking of the Antigone story, it has a riveting central performance by Jaroslava Tichá as the widow determined to bury her husband in the village from which he was expelled, an extraordinarily concentrated narrative economy, and superb black and white photography which makes the very most of its freezing snowscapes.

Other highlights: *The Ark of Fools*, a cross between Chekhov and Ken Russell set in an appalling nineteenth-century asylum in rural Russia; *The Seventh Day, the Eighth Night*, Evald Schorm's black fable about the destructive effects of fear and suspicion on a rural community; *Images of an Old World*, a portrait of the ancient inhabitants of remote Slovakian hill farms which brings to mind both Ivens and Jennings in its revelation of the surreal potential of the documentary; *The Ear*, a wonderful study in paranoia which at times comes across as a bugged version of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, and Jirí Menzel's *Larks on a String*, a scathing satire on the Stalinist 're-education' of dissidents.

Czechoslovakia was represented in the competition by Antonin Masa's *Were We Really Like This?*, which examines the sick state of society under the old régime through the microcosm of a theatre company. This won the Jury Prize, though many found it talky and rather dull, its subject matter notwith-

standing. Another film dealing with recent events in Eastern Europe was the Polish *State of Fear*, for which Janusz Kijowski won the Director's Prize. This was quite an efficient political thriller, but again one felt that the events it was depicting were more interesting than the film itself.

Also worth catching was the Hungarian *Fast and Loose*, the story of two part-time hookers in Budapest. Apart from the fact that the central characters were just that in real life, the chief interest of the film lay in its portrayal of the sleazy side of life in an East European city (a sleaziness which could at times be glimpsed in Karlovy Vary itself). The director György Sjomas described it as a 'post-Gorbachev film in which a world is broken down and another world seeps in. Western civilisation, however, shows its least favourable face first, we have to realise that.'

Though exploitative and irritatingly mannered, the film has a certain verve. It also raised (albeit implicitly) questions about Western influences of the kind that were being discussed elsewhere in the festival. For beneath all the euphoria there were real worries about the direction of the film industry under the 'free market'. Significantly, these worries were voiced as much, if not more, by visitors from outside Eastern Europe. It would clearly be tragic if political censorship were to be replaced by the economic variety, and if the first 'liberated' Karlovy Vary festival were also to prove the last.

JULIAN PETLEY

MURDER II Hitchcock's German double

Alfred Hitchcock's career as a fully fledged director began in Germany, with *The Pleasure Garden* and *The Mountain Eagle*, and it has often been remarked that the Hitchcock 'touch' has a little Germanic force behind it. It might even be claimed that Hitchcock was the first non-German director to open up the Anglo-Saxon cinema to Expressionist influence. Which makes the emergence of *Mary*, the German-language version of his 1930 film *Murder!*, shot at the same time on the same sets but with a German cast, a fascinating case for study. The film only surfaced recently on East German television, and through the FIAF exchange programme the National Film Archive has acquired a print for reference purposes.

In his interview with Truffaut, Hitchcock expressed dissatisfaction with this 'double'. 'Before the shooting, when I went to Berlin to talk over the script, they proposed many changes that I turned down. As it happens, I was wrong. I refused them because I was satisfied with the English version... But as soon as we started to shoot, I realised that I had no ear for the German language. Many touches that were quite funny in the English version were not at all amusing in the German one, as, for instance, the ironic asides on the loss of dignity or on snobishness. The [lead] German actor was ill at ease, and I came

to realise that I simply didn't know enough about the German idiom.'

The first thing to be said about *Mary*, however, is that in many respects it looks a much smoother job of film-making than *Murder!*. It runs some twelve minutes shorter—which may be due to some of the less satisfactory pieces of social comedy having been cut. Generally, it doesn't seem to be as hamstrung by the difficulties of primitive sound recording, or perhaps by the staginess of the original conception. But in becoming a tighter movie, it has also become less characteristically Hitchcock. The irony is, looking at *Murder!*, that some of those characteristics seem precisely what one might call the Expressionist influence.

In almost every instance, these feed into the social comedy, the preoccupation with class and style, theatricality and self-presentation, which concerns the film as much as its murder plot and accounts for its rather rambling air. There is, for instance, the scene in which the stage manager Markham, summoned to meet the actor-manager/amateur sleuth Sir John (Herbert Marshall), approaches him across his luxurious study and literally sinks into the carpet. Or there are the various cut-in shots of food—the glass of beer and hunk of bread as Mrs Markham talks grandly about her 'elevenses', or the groaning board summoned in fantasy by Sir John—which are used to define characters and turn the screws on what often seems to be the film's own delight in snobish attitudes.

Not only class but character comedy as such has been cut back in *Mary*. In the jury-room scene, for instance, there is one less cameo of a befuddled jury member putting in his own nonsensical two-penny worth. (There also seems to be less—Expressionist?—heightening of the chorus of jurors rounding on Sir John, the one hold-out for not guilty, with a cry of 'What do you say to that, Sir John?') In other ways, there are some touching carry-overs between the two films: the heroine wears the same prison uniform, with the same number, and the exterior shot of the prison, cut in at different points, always shows the time at 1.30 pm in both versions. The most significant absence is that of Hitchcock himself, who appears in a street scene in *Murder!* but not in *Mary*.

In small ways, the English-German cross-over affects one's perception of the film. Exactly the same shot of a little row of thatched houses, in the provincial town where the repertory

Zdenek Sirovy's *Funeral Ceremonies*.



company is performing at the beginning, suddenly strikes one as Grimm-like in *Mary*. The fact that the heroine's name has been changed from Diana Baring (in *Murder!*) to Mary—as has Markham's to Brown—is presumably meant to make them more archetypally English, while the playing is unmistakably German (and unexpectedly modern). The upper-class flutiness of Nora Baring as Diana has become a more soulful but neutral quality in Olga Tchekowa's Mary.

The theatrical milieu is also made to seem less in *Mary*, which dispenses with the comparison with *Hamlet* in the central conceit of exposing the villain by getting him to act out a 'play' of his crime. And the sexual ambivalence of Handel Fane (Esmé Percy) in *Murder!* has gone, both in terms of performance and the doubly contemptuous epithet, 'half-breed', which is used to refer to his homosexuality. *Mary* is a neat little potboiler, efficient but rather empty, precisely because all the elements of 'fun', the play on spectacle, dressing-up and pretending, which make *Murder!* so messy, have gone.

RICHARD COMBS

TAMERLANE

An enemy of the people?

The veteran Uzbek director Ali Khamraev has dreamed of making a film about Tamerlane for a quarter of a century. Though Tamerlane has been dead for almost six hundred years, his story has remained off limits. At the modern headquarters of the Union of Uzbek film-makers in Tashkent, Khamraev wailed, 'It took me twenty-five years to convince the Communist party leaders that Tamerlane was not an enemy of the people.'

The last of the mighty conquerors of Central Asia, Tamerlane drove the Mongol horde out of Central Asia and Persia in 1391, then invaded Turkey, Russia, India, and began a massive assault on China just before his death in 1405. But the empire that this warrior spent a lifetime building proved fragile and collapsed immediately after his death. Many nervously predict that a similar fate awaits a post-Gorbachev Soviet Union.

Khamraev was not allowed to make the film, he explained, 'because the subject of Tamerlane has long been taboo, even though for Uzbeks he is a national hero. He liberated them from the Mongols. But the authorities fear issues that evoke nationalism and ethnicity in Central Asia. We have been told to forget about our national heroes.'



Social solecism in *Murder!*: Phyllis Konstam takes a teaspoon to her soup; Edward Chapman and Herbert Marshall look on.

The project remained a dream until Michelangelo Antonioni invited Khamraev to Italy, where he began exploring international co-production possibilities. After two years of negotiations that Khamraev wistfully refers to as 'breaking down another sort of bureaucracy', he received the green light from International Cinema Company president Giuseppe Colomba. The company has other current projects in the Soviet Union, including Sergei Bondarchuk's screen version of the Mikhail Sholokov novel *And Quiet Flows the Don* and Tolomush Okeev's *Genghis Khan*.

Tamerlane will not be a Soviet film, but rather an international co-production with a Soviet director, and it will be made in English. Though Khamraev confesses that he is under heavy local pressure to cast an Uzbek actor, he clearly understands the international box-office system. His top three choices are Sean Connery, Jack Nicholson and Charles Bronson.

A small portion of the financing for *Tamerlane* will be provided by the Uzbek government which, in return, will receive USSR distribution rights. But a film on this scale could only be produced by a western entity. The Soviet Union has neither the financial ability, the required technical hardware, nor the specialised personnel. About a third of the film will be shot in Uzbekistan. (*Tamerlane* is buried in Samarkand, which flourished as a great cultural and scientific centre during his reign, even though he spent little time there.) The remainder will be made on location in China, Syria, India, Spain and Kashmir. Interiors will be shot at the Cinecittà studios in Rome.

In the style of today's international super-productions, *Tamerlane* will be made in two versions: 4-5 hours for television and 135 minutes for cinema release. Khamraev pointed out that in fact two cinema versions will be produced: one for international release and one for the Moslem world (including his native Uzbekistan). 'So as not to insult Moslem people, and avoid a "Rushdie" problem. The Moslem version also will include Eastern-style music and dancing and no nudity or eroticism.' Shooting is due to begin this autumn.

FORREST S. CIESOL

VIETNAM, SOVIET STYLE

On location in Tajikistan

'There were many parallels with Vietnam. There was no way to go on, and the people were against it. It was a tragedy for both nations.' The speaker was the Soviet film director Vladimir Bortko, a stocky, balding, fast-talking 44-year-old with a red-dish military moustache. He was talking about the USSR's nine-year war against the Afghan mujahedin, which he saw at first hand, and on which he was making the first Soviet feature film. Provisionally entitled *Afghan Breakdown*, it might as aptly be called *Afghan Agony* or *Afghan Apocalypse Now*.

Its hero is a maverick Red Army major, Bandura, who begins to have doubts about the war. To secure the safe withdrawal of Soviet troops, he is ordered to buy off the local mujahedin with money and

arms. He contacts them through Gulakan, an Afghan engineer who has studied in the USSR. Wary sympathy grows between the two men. But another mujahedin group attacks the Red Army, and Bandura's commanding officer orders reprisals—with tragic, bloody results.

The Soviet Army General Staff read Aleksandr Tchervinsky's screenplay, and not only raised no objections but actually offered its full support. Afghanistan, still troubled, was out of the question as a location for the filming; but the neighbouring Soviet Republic of Tajikistan to the North-West made a perfect substitute, with high mountains and very similar terrain: young, craggy peaks, dark-brown dusty hillsides with sparse vegetation and stony wadis.

Shooting began on 6 February 1990—and stopped one week later. Although the Tajik capital Dushambe is now a rather lush modern city of 500,000 inhabitants with a Prospekt Lenina and a Kommunisticheskaya Street, until 1924 it was still just a tent encampment, a halt on the caravan routes whose name means simply 'Monday'. Under Stalin, it was known as Stalinabad; and, like nearby Samarkand, it has flourishing industries. Yet the locals still wear traditional costume—the women in multicoloured cottons and silks, the men in sashes and baggy trousers, and both in black-and-silver embroidered skullcaps. Ethnic feeling is still strong; and in February it erupted in riots, partly against Armenian immigrants. Twenty-five people were killed; martial law was declared; and Bortko's film was interrupted.

Work began again on 26 March. When I visited the shoot in late July, martial law and a curfew were still in force, but the film was near completion. Its final cost will be some \$10 million, though the facilities offered free by the Red Army are estimated to be worth a further \$20-25 million. They include 500 troops (some of them, ironically, playing mujahedin); 40 helicopters; an Army canteen; tanks, trucks and armoured vehicles; and the construction of both a traditional mountain village of mud huts with reed thatch and a long, narrow, precipitous and dangerous crumbling dirt road up to it. I travelled it twice in four-wheel-drive Army transport, and was relieved thereafter to ride in the comparative safety of Soviet choppers.

The star of the picture is Michele Placido, the tough, youngish Italian actor famous in the USSR as well as in France and Italy for his role as a Mafia-busting policeman in the tv mini-series *The Octopus*. On the

way up in the mountains, he was actually mobbed by genuine local villagers, TV addicts to a man. His presence, and that of his fellow-Italian Alessandro Stefanelli, accounts for the 30 per cent of the film's cost being borne by Clemi Cinematografica, Rome, who have world TV and cinema distribution rights outside Eastern Europe and the USSR. Their Soviet co-producers are Russkoe Video and Lenfilm, both of Leningrad.

Soviet film companies are now allowed to keep 90 per cent of their profits, which previously went to the State; and Lenfilm's President Aleksandr Golutva is keen to engage in further co-productions with the West. Following the Cannes prize-winner *Taxis Blues*, he plans films on the Messina earthquake (with a French company) and the siege of Leningrad (with Goffredo Lombardo). With the rouble slipping, glasnost in full spate, and an immense variety of scenery and climate, the Soviet Union could just become the Spain of the 1990s—an inexpensive El Dorado for film-makers.

For the future, much will depend on the success of *Afghan Breakdown*. Edited and post-synchronised in Rome, it will be distributed in three language versions—Russian, Italian and English. Initially a two-hour cinema film, it will be issued later for television in two episodes of 90 minutes each. Myself, I have seen no rushes, and can therefore hazard no advance judgment. But having witnessed some of the violent action scenes at very close quarters, I can vouch for their authenticity. One of them—blowing up a village house on the mountainside—actually wounded the man standing next to me. It was reassuring to note how like a blood pod real blood can be.

RICHARD MAYNE

EDINBURGH

Plenty of films; not much money

Edinburgh's 44th Festival, crammed full of special events and awards this year, more than justified its reputation for making very little in the way of grant aid and sponsorship go a very long way. But there was no doubt that David Robinson, its director, had the same hard task in making ends meet as he had when he took over the festival at short notice in 1989. More money is clearly desperately needed if the event is to progress, and that probably means more sponsorship, since it does not look very likely that the Scottish Film Council or the Edinburgh District Council will



Pupi Avati's *The Story of Boys and Girls*.

come up with increased funds in the present economic climate.

Audiences for the packed programme varied from the excellent to the derisory. It seemed like a year when people were making careful, safe choices. But there were enough attractive propositions to avoid disaster at the box-office, and enough surprises to keep most of the more adventurous happy.

One of them was the Pupi Avati retrospective, which enjoyed gradually increasing support as the festival progressed and proved beyond doubt that this gifted Italian director is worth knowing better outside his home country. His best work, like *The Story of Boys and Girls*, which recalls the day of his own parents' engagement party, has a universal appeal that reminds one of Ermanno Olmi.

The other retrospective was more controversial, since John Landis, the commercially successful director of *An American Werewolf In London* and *The Blues Brothers*, can hardly be called underexposed. But his presence at Edinburgh, where he gave copious interviews and spoke with as many young film-makers as he could find, made the tribute to his often splendidly anarchic films the more worthwhile. And anyone with his golden touch at the box-office certainly has some lessons for all those British film-makers struggling to draw audiences to the cinema at all.

Landis suggested that the present domination of Hollywood in Europe, and the attendant dangers for European film culture, were not facts known to the creative American film community, who would be deeply disturbed

by it. And he made a plea that an official delegation from Europe should venture into the jaws of the enemy and talk not to Hollywood's moneymen but to its directors and writers—many of whom, like himself, had been brought up on European and world cinema and would ultimately be badly affected if it collapsed.

Other visitors included Clint Eastwood for *White Hunter, Black Heart* and Bertrand Tavernier for *These Foolish Things* (the new title for his *Daddy Nostalgie*, shown at Cannes). Both gave Guardian Lectures and had full houses for their films, though the tight security surrounding the almost regal visit of the former prevented a very friendly and unassuming superstar from sharing, like the voluble Tavernier, in the fun of the event. The problem for the festival was that, in the absence of funds to support such visits, they tend to be taken over by the big companies concerned, which do not always share the same priorities.

The major new award this year, sponsored by BAFTA-Shell, was the Michael Powell prize for the best British film on display. That went to David Hayman's *Silent Screams*, already awarded the Silver Bear for Best Actor (Iain Glen) at Berlin.

The jury proclaimed itself surprised and delighted that the general standard was so high and that the films on display were so different in content and style. But one couldn't help feeling that only a handful of the twenty films had much chance of succeeding in the cinema, largely because they were made with television budgets and on too

small a scale. The winner got a clear majority of votes, but there were special commendations for the sensitivity of Thaddeus O'Sullivan's *December Bride*, also a debut feature, and the courage of Ken Loach's *Hidden Agenda*.

The awards apart, several films on the programme seemed to please audiences and critics alike. Tavernier's *These Foolish Things* (reviewed from Cannes, where it surprisingly escaped the attention of the jury) was one of them, and Whit Stillman's *Metropolitan*, a debut of some style and equipped with a highly literate screenplay, was another.

This was perhaps not surprising. But Kaizu Hayashi's *Circus Boys* (winner of the Charles Chaplin Award for the best film by a new director), which followed the same director's imaginative silent first feature, *To Sleep So As to Dream*, was an unexpected pleasure—the story of two boys who join a circus and then try their acquired sleight of hand in the real world outside. Shot in black and white, the film not only looks magnificent, but has circus scenes of Felliniesque virtuosity and magical atmosphere that betokens a real cinematic talent.

There was no better animation on display than in Lesley Keen's *Ra: The Path of the Sun God*, an exploration of Egyptian mythological themes which took four years to make and justified the effort with work of stunning visual appeal. Derek Jarman's *The Garden*, a non-narrative attack on religious attitudes to homosexuality, also contained some of his best work, making obvious connections with the AIDS seminar mounted at the festival, where speakers attacked the media, and especially television, for hypocritical, naive and often misleading statements about the disease.

Judging by the films on the subject on display, cinemagoers are luckier. Both Robert Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman's Oscar-winning documentary *Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt* and Norman Rene's fictional *Longtime Companion* managed to avoid most of the clichés inherent in tackling the subject and to appeal, at the same time, to those outside the gay community whose misconceptions were part of the seminar's theme.

All this dovetailed well with David Puttnam's lecture at the festival, rather pompously titled 'Cinema and the Environment of the Mind'. What he actually said was that if you don't make films of some moral and cultural value, you shouldn't make them at all. Edinburgh showed a good many, even if masterpieces were not on the agenda this year.

DEREK MALCOLM

VISION OFF

Myopia at Edinburgh

This year's Edinburgh International Television Festival should, theoretically, have been the most dynamic since the challenging days of the Channel 4 debates. Instead, it turned out to be what some people diplomatically called low-key. Dull might be a better description. Not that some interesting things weren't said. But overall there was no spark, no feeling that television in the 1990s could be on the brink of an exciting transformation, that with the old order breaking down here was an opportunity to shape a different future.

Perhaps it was the festival's 'quality' theme that stultified. Since, for a start, no one could agree just what defines quality television—though everyone knows it when they see it—the debate lacked much in the way of intellectual rigour. And given today's cultural climate, spinning wild futuristic fantasies wasn't really on the agenda. Even the most artistic acknowledged the 'realities' (i.e. money, or the lack of it) that underpin their endeavours. Verity Lambert, in her opening MacTaggart speech, defined quality almost exclusively in terms of cash.

'Money does mean that high production values can be attained and that projects are properly researched and developed . . . that there will be a good mix of programmes in the schedules . . . that programme-makers can be innovative—and, most important, that the occasional risk can be taken, even that the odd mistake can be made. Money also means that dramas and documentaries about domestic subjects can be made—fully financed from the domestic market.'

It was gratifying, though, that for once the viewing audience came in for slightly more than a grudging mention. Indeed during the only session which actually tackled the problem of definition head-on, 'Never Mind the Quality, Feel the Rating', viewers even got a limited chance to put their own views, in the form of a short filmed vox pop. What this small sample turned out to want from television was something 'objective, interesting, stimulating and entertaining, which holds my interest.' What they'd like to see, in other words, is something they'd like to see.

Giving the audience what it wants to see (though not necessarily only what it already knows) was the essential message from Time-Warner's Steven Ross. His 'Worldview' lecture

was perhaps the most intriguing event of the festival, presenting a horrifying scenario of world domination by benignity. Had it been Murdoch, the room would have resounded with hissing. But Ross' soothing American tones received enthusiastic applause.

Another soft-toned American, Jeffrey Lewis, offered a rather less supine view of the system. Lewis, a former writer on *Hill Street Blues*, had come to talk about the industry's latest panacea—the long-form series—and had no illusions about where innovative programmes found their chance. Only when a US network is in big trouble, and desperately in need of critical success to tide it over until ratings pick up, Lewis contended, will it contemplate accepting something out of the ordinary. *Hill Street Blues*, *Twin Peaks* and *thirtysomething* all fell into favour during hard times. However, this also shows just how much power programme-makers can exert, and it's a power that US writers at least have learnt to wield with vigour.

Any signs of energy within our own industry only emerged with the discussion of actual programmes. Independent film-makers laid claim to the rights to their programmes—both to give them valuable assets and to increase their editorial control. And rarely seen passion erupted during the debate on the ethics of drama-documentary. The clash of the two Peters—Kosminsky and Taylor—over the truthfulness or otherwise of Kosminsky's *Shoot to Kill* may have deflected discussion away from the principles involved, but it graphically illustrated the difficulties inherent in the form.

At one time, such discussion would have been commonplace at Edinburgh. But in recent years the festival—a misnomer for what's really a conference—has drifted away from its original purposes. It's also become unwieldy. Twenty-three sessions squashed into the Bank Holiday weekend means that rarely does everyone share the same experience. Less could mean more.

A more relaxed schedule might also make the festival's organisers less inclined to boss everyone about. It could be argued they were being democratic, since they were rude to everyone irrespective of position or status, but it's more likely they just didn't know what Jonathan Powell looked like. Altogether, though, the officious atmosphere felt all too symptomatic of an event which seems increasingly locked into the short focus, to the exclusion of any wider vision. And what happened to the farewell party?

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Sight & Sound Fall 90

WITH THE APPROACH OF 1992, Europe's film and television producers are developing a taste for Europudding. Here's the recipe:

Take a story that crosses the borders of two or more Member States in the European Community. Anodyne, preferably historical subjects are recommended. (Take care not to favour any single national perspective or choose a subject that could offend the national sensibility of any of the other EC Member States.)

Add a writer and director from those same Member States, then gently solicit investment from their domestic television networks. Fill in application forms for EC-wide production subsidies (30 copies in English and French).

Fold in the appropriate number of actors and technicians from each country. These will vary according to the coproduction agreements between the EC Member States participating in your Europudding.

Begin production when the contributions can cover the cost of a telefilm. (For a TV mini-series you can stretch this recipe without necessarily increasing the financial ingredients.)

For best results, shoot all close-ups in the language of each of your Member State partners. (Optional: shoot your Europudding in English and *dub* additional language tracks.)

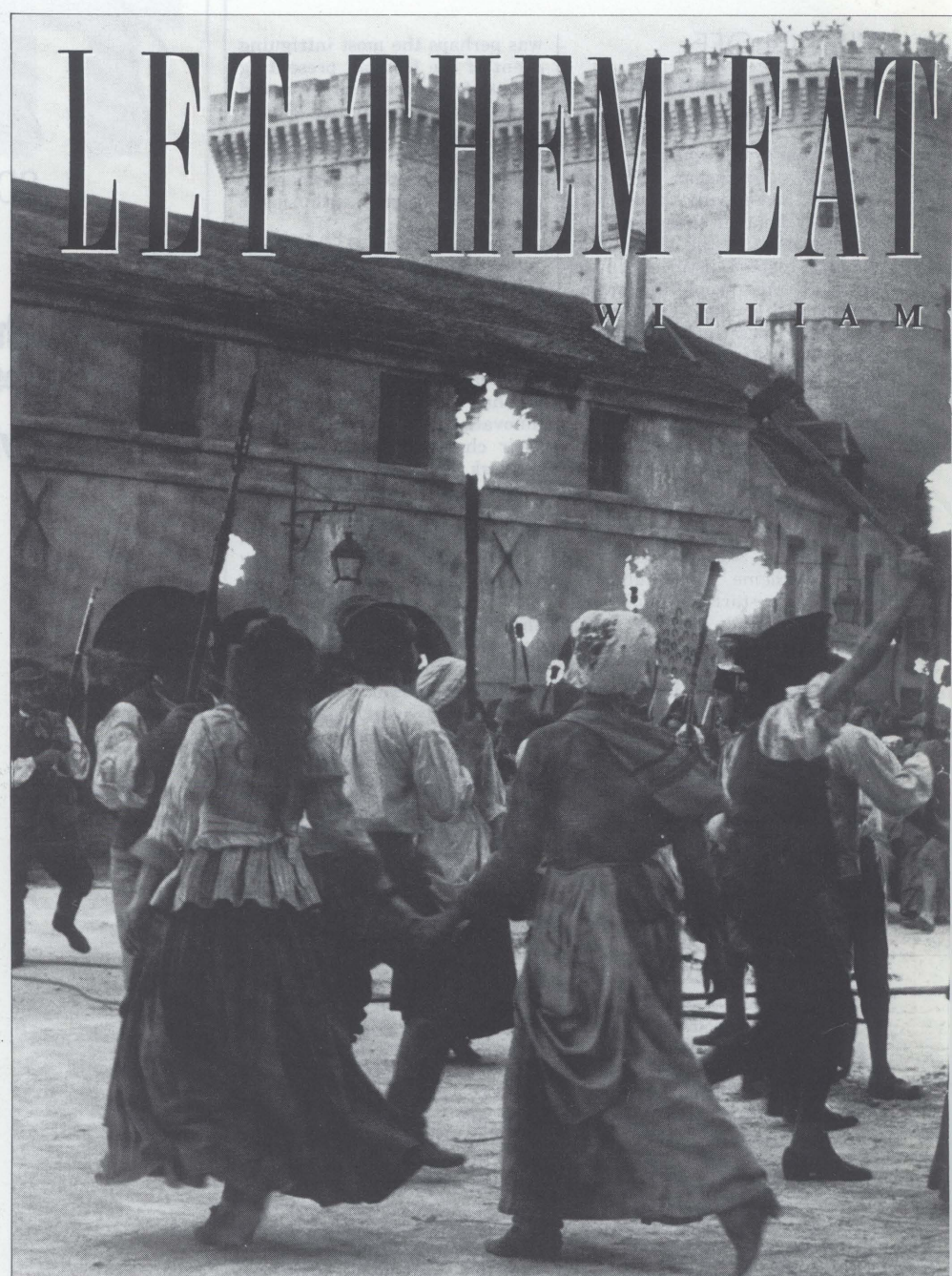
Your Europudding will be ready when all the various partners are satisfied that they can fill their television air time without inordinate embarrassment.

YIELD: Two hours-plus of a deal-driven fictional 'screen entertainment' devoid of distinctive contour or flavour.

For gravy, sell your Europudding as a feature film in your constituent EC Member States and as a telefilm/mini-series abroad.

Having trouble imagining the result? Think of those Italian epic dramas that mix and match polyglot casts in biblical and historical settings: *Jesus of Nazareth*, *Moses*, *The Longiver*, *Marco Polo*, *Christopher Columbus*, or more recently *The Betrothed*, a love story set against the seventeenth-century Spanish occupation of Lombardy with Burt Lancaster, Franco Nero, Helmut Berger and Fernando Rey.

Not all Europuddings, however, are based on left-over themes and has-been actors. Just look at the one Robert Altman whipped up using the life of Vincent Van Gogh (Altman's was one of four batches based on the subject). In his feature-film-cum-2-and-4-part-mini-series *Vincent and Theo*, the director executed a variation *à l'américaine* with the non-name brand Euro-ingredients provided by the coproducing countries (France, Germany, Holland and the UK). Altman's affinity for improvisation—together with the actors' often improbable accents—turned screenwriter Julian Mitchell's



public-school vision of the Van Gogh fraternal agony into a bad translation of Brecht:

VINCENT VAN GOGH: Madame Vivian, this is Paul Gauguin.

ARLES BROTHEL-KEEPER: Hello, Paul. Nice meeting you.

VINCENT VAN GOGH: He's a painter.

ARLES BROTHEL-KEEPER: Oh, great!

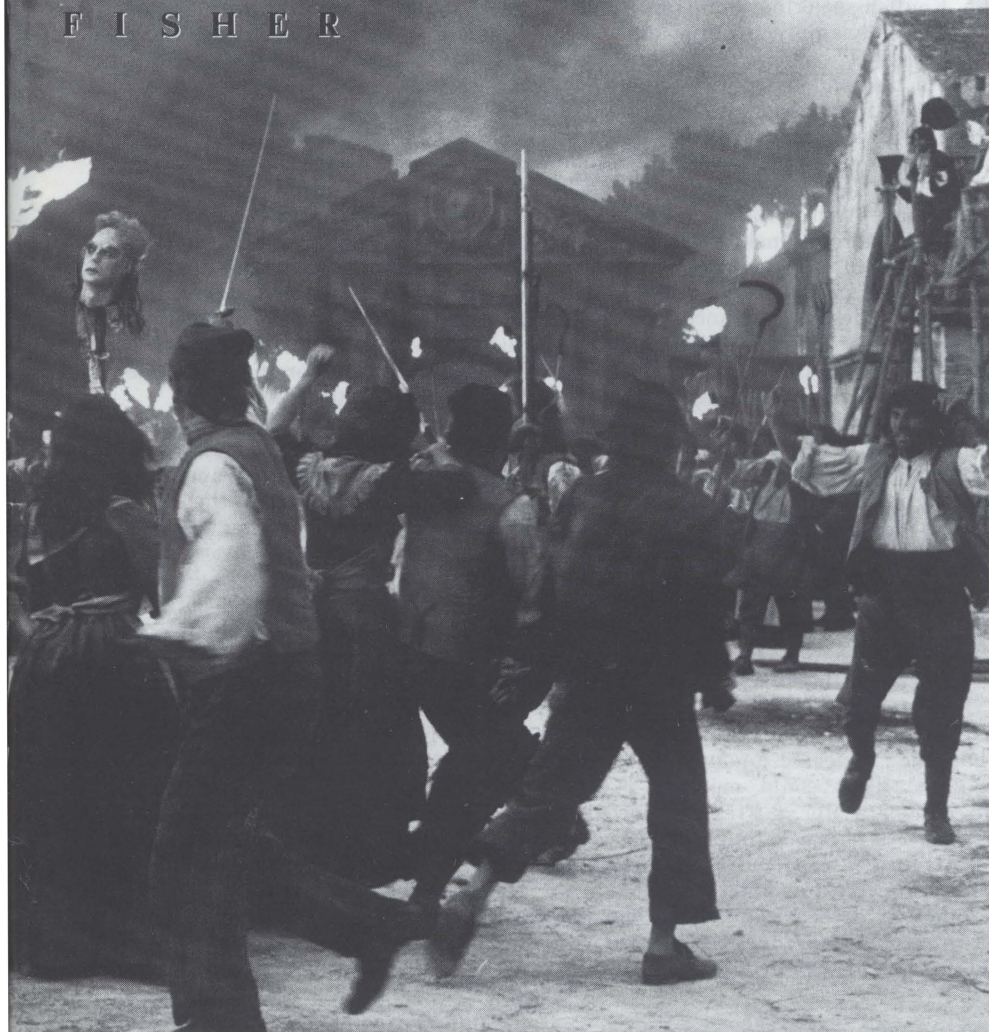
Still, Altman's foray into the genre shouldn't lead you to believe that Europudding always comes in unusual flavours. Consider the Eurositcom *La Famille Fontaine*, recently proposed by a French production company: 'A series which is best described as modern, funny, open to Europe: it is a typical family of our time where both parents work while raising their five children aged 7 to 15. Quite often, the Fontaines have guests from other countries and no

topic of conversation is taboo, but to prevent conflicts between parents and children, they are all very cheerful, relaxed and full of humour.' Although still in production, this series of thirty episodes, 26 minutes each, sounds like a shoo-in for Most Bland Concoction.

But by the same token Europudding can actually look impressive—even appetising—when served up properly. Take, for example, last year's \$50 million gallic bicentennial treat *The French Revolution*. A main course of immense proportions, *The French Revolution* consisted of two dual-language (French and English) feature films (each with versions of differing length) and a mini-series. The project was a co-venture between a French production company and a public network, a Canadian company, two Italian companies and a German partner in association

EUROPUDDING

F I S H E R



Eurorepast: *The French Revolution*.

with ITV network Central Television. For the occasion, a Russian-born producer brought together two directors (Robert Enrico and Richard Heffron), a handful of major French stars, thousands of extras (including a contingent from the French army), a big-name cast that included Brits (Jane Seymour, Christopher Lee), an Austrian (Klaus Maria Brandauer), a Pole (Andrzej Seweryn), a New Zealander (Sam Neill), two Italians (Claudia Cardinale and Vittorio Mezzogiorno) and a Canadian script girl. That tally doesn't even include Peter Ustinov, whose cosmopolitan background sends the nationality counter off the scale.

After a Eurorepast like this, who has room for cake?

It doesn't take a culinary historian to recognise that the above recipe isn't

part of Europe's traditional cultural cuisines. The Europudding owes its existence to two very recent developments on the Continent: private television and pan-European cooperation.

With the deregulation of European television, the number of networks and the length of the broadcast day increased in most EC countries. So too did Europe's demand for programming. But while there is plenty of programming to go round in the international marketplace, much of it is American series and telefilms. In the eyes of EC legislators, all too much of it for the good of European producers and audiences.

In response, the EC Member States adopted the so-called 'Television Without Frontiers' Directive in October 1989, which imposed a 'political commitment' on European networks: the networks should seek to broadcast

wherever practicable a majority of programming originating from the EC. Although not legally binding, 'Television Without Frontiers' was meant to provide at least the incentive for a sort of Single Market for the EC audiovisual industry.

To help that industry meet its new 'political commitment', the EC also created an extensive array of assistance programmes for European producers under the banner of MEDIA (a superb acronym that stands for 'Measures to Encourage the Development of the Industries of Audiovisual Production'). The programme's budget is of the order of ECU 1 billion. For those that don't speak European, that's significantly more than US\$1 billion.

The Europudding is in part a response to these developments. It is as much a business strategy as a cultural innovation. Europe's ambitious new networks demand ambitious new programmes. But for Europe's national cinemas—whose resources are grossly outsized by those of their American counterparts—coproduction between countries and reliance on finance from television and public sources are often the only ways to realise the big-budget projects which broadcasters now demand.

Thus, European partners involved in a \$6 million project such as *Vincent and Theo* collectively shared the risk, each covering his financial exposure with a television deal in his own territory. If the feature film version of *Vincent and Theo* fails to perform well at movie theatres in one of those territories—as it did, for example, in Holland—the coproducer in that territory still recoups much of his investment through the sale of television broadcast rights to the mini-series version to one of his local networks. Likewise, each producer can appeal to public sources—in the case of *Vincent and Theo*, to France's National Cinema Centre (CNC)—for additional support. Whether it yields 'ambitious screen entertainment' or middle-of-the-road dross, this recipe can make for very good business.

Is Europudding the amorphous face of Europe's post-1992 film and television culture? While that remains to be seen, there has certainly been widespread advocacy—most recently in the United Kingdom—to improve Eurokitchen conditions for the cinema by increasing support from television and from the state.

A recent vitriolic leader in the *Economist*, which lambasted the notion of state subsidies for the British cinema, brought quick ripostes from leaders of the UK film industry. Producer David Puttnam and Simon Olswang argued that UK television should be required to 'divert part of the money which it would otherwise pay to the Treasury toward the purchase . . . of British films.' Simon Relph, outgoing head of British Screen,

‘To French producers, nothing is more obvious than the enhanced commercial potential of a French motion picture, telefilm or series made in English.’

argued that the £1.5 million recently committed by the Thatcher government to European production is an ‘incentive to encourage a successful industry to invest more in itself.’

Guests at Mrs Thatcher’s film industry seminar in July lobbied for support from television and the state with reference to France, where a whole range of state-imposed ‘incentives’—from television quotas for French programmes to tax-shelters for production—exist for the cinema. The example is instructive.

France boasts not only Europe’s most prolific film industry (with some 130 productions a year), but also its most ‘mature’ television industry as well as the highest levels of state support. Arguably, France also takes ‘culture’ more seriously than any other European country. For all these reasons, Frenchmen regard the potential insipidity of Europudding with greater apprehension than their EC counterparts—even as the French crank them out with greater facility.

The dispute over this issue in France is especially clear-cut. It also benefits from the absence of that ideologically charged word that usually surfaces in such debates: ‘quality’. The cultural threat posed by the Europuddings’ systematically bland scripts or undistinguished directorial styles is difficult to assess. However, the imposition of today’s ‘international language’—English—on French film and television production for commercial reasons is perceived by some in France as a clear and present danger to the national culture.

To French producers, nothing is more obvious than the enhanced commercial potential of a French motion picture, telefilm or series made in English. They point to their country’s own shrinking theatrical market, to growing international cable, satellite and home video outlets, and to record revenues generated by the top French title of 1988, Luc Besson’s *The Big Blue*, which was shot in English.

The CNC, cinema arm of the Ministry of Culture, sees it differently. These films may sell abroad, but are they French? And if they aren’t, why should French public money be spent on them? Last year, French Minister of Culture Jack Lang declared that only those productions shot in French would be able to tap into the FFfr 200 million earmarked by the Ministry for domestic production.

Lang argued that the decision wasn’t based strictly on linguistic chauvinism. Like Roberto Rossellini before him, France’s cultural minister believes that

the most successful ‘international’ film is a successful ‘national’ film: English-language French pictures don’t necessarily make good economic sense when the English-speaking countries of the world already amply fill the space.

Although *The Big Blue*, for example, made a tremendous splash at home in its dubbed French version, it floundered abroad—notably in the United States—in its original English version. Other sizeable English-language French failures are Arthur Joffe’s \$10m *Harem* (1985), Roman Polanski’s swashbuckler *Pirates* (1986) and the big-budget sci-fi film *Terminus* (1987). Other English-language titles from France that fared only slightly better (because their budgets were correspondingly more modest) were Elie Chouraqui’s *Man on Fire* (1988) and Diane Kurys’ *A Man in Love* (1988). The relative lack of international interest in last year’s most eagerly awaited ‘French’ film, Milos Forman’s English-language *Valmont*, seemed to confirm the rule. The film’s producer Claude Berri paradoxically scored bigger international successes with his own Franco-Français diptych *Jean de Florette* and *Manon des Sources* than he did with *Valmont*.

In the name of French culture, Lang decided to reserve CNC support for films that had a specific amount of ‘French content’. That could mean a French director or writer, a French subject (or at least a subject that can be shot mostly in France), and a certain number of French actors and technicians.

Likewise, English-language films and TV programmes produced in France will no longer be counted as ‘French’ for

purposes of the country’s programme quotas. French networks are currently required to fill 50 per cent of their broadcast day with French programmes and another 10 per cent with European shows. Furthermore, the channels must invest a minimum of 15 per cent of their net income in ‘French’ production and set aside 120 hours a week for new ‘French’ works.

The result? Producers now complain that the stiff requirements for French content are so daunting that they have curtailed interest from potential European coproducers. As for the quotas which were originally designed to bolster the sagging French production industry, they have actually worsened the industry’s lot by forcing investments that are proving too costly.

This has been the case for the country’s two smaller private stations. Both channels have been investing less in French productions than the law requires. The networks prefer to pay stiff fines for violating the law: it is ultimately more cost efficient to do so than to meet the obligations and potentially lose their already small audience. If the channels are forced to comply with the new rules, analysts speculate that they will be squeezed out, thus depriving French production companies of what little income they currently derive from them.

What lesson should the British and other European cinemas draw from the French experience?

Before reaching for a helping hand from television for their projects, perhaps producers in the European

The Big Blue, the top French title of 1988.



‘Europe will need some 16,000 hours of primetime fiction over the next five years, but will be capable of producing no more than 2,500 hours.’

cinema should first seek funds elsewhere—for example, from financial institutions and markets, the way other industries do.

Statistics show that the apparently buoyant effect of television money on French motion picture finance has actually been pernicious. In spite of the country's vast cinema output in recent years, French moviegoers have been voting with their feet, and their pocket-books, for—*quelle ironie*—American films. The latter now control more than a 50 per cent share of France's theatrical market. Before the advent of private television—and the ‘easy’ money it brought to film finance—French movies handily dominated their home market. Arguably, in the old days producers were more exacting with film projects because they spent more of their own money to mount a film and had to count on moviegoers to pay at the box-office to see it. Now producers can settle for a feature film of middling quality and still recoup their investment through tv deals.

Likewise, the French example shows that state intervention doesn't necessarily improve the lot of the *national cinema*. At most it can keep the industry working—which goes a long way towards explaining why industry professionals lobby for it so ardently. In spite of all his rhetoric about French culture, Jack Lang's priority for the cinema is perhaps less the well-being of *le patrimoine culturel français* than of the film and television business, which is a locus of high-stakes investment and many jobs. France's entertainment industry technicians, network administrators,

laboratory facility workers—right down the line to the popcorn vendors in French movie theatres—are, after all, Lang's constituency. In spite of his claims that culture is somehow ‘above’ politics, it is clear that the Minister of Culture himself dare not be if he wants to keep his job.

On the other hand, it must be said that a great number of feature films of exceptional accomplishment would never have been made without the support of French television or the French public sector. Genuine masterpieces such as *Et la lumière fut* (And There Was Light) by Georgian film-maker Otar Ioselliani or *Yaaba* by Burkina Faso film-maker Idrissa Ouedraogo could not have been made without the support provided by European coproduction agreements involving France and deals with French and other European television networks.

But these are films by internationally celebrated film-makers whose artistic ambitions oblige them to operate outside the perimeter of the commercial market. Can the same be said for the big-budget, middle-brow Europrogrammes under discussion here which solicit the same benefits?

Even a relatively successful example such as *Vincent and Theo*, made by a director who has also been internationally feted, is difficult to redeem artistically. Altman, perhaps more than any other mainstream director, has experimented with the formal aspects of the narrative cinema. In the best of his motion picture work, *Nashville* or *McCabe and Mrs Miller* for example, Altman's experiments with multi-track

sound recording and ‘flashing’ the film stock created new technical possibilities for cinematic storytelling. His best tv work, *Tanner for President*, challenged audience relations to the medium by mixing fact with fiction, actors with public figures.

However, when working in a hybrid genre like the *Europudding*, Altman was obliged to abandon his long-standing habit of formal reflection. Should the camera operator frame the shot for television or for the cinema? How should the sound engineer's work change to accommodate television's limited ability to reproduce the detail of a motion picture soundtrack? These questions were suppressed in the interest of a one-size-fits-all programming venture. Arguably, if the *Europudding* can't emerge as a legitimate genre in its own right with its own artistic claims in the hands of Robert Altman, it can never do so.

That's bad news. For ec experts make no secret of the fact that Europe will need some 16,000 hours of primetime fiction over the next five years, but will be capable of producing no more than 2,500 hours. What sort of programmes will be created in the rush to fill the void? And what kind of export market will there be for them outside Europe? The political commitment to a ‘majority of ec programming’ means bad culture in the short term and bad business in the long term.

ec lawmakers and industry lobbyists, formerly distressed over the ruin wrought by American programmes on European culture, should consider the number Europe is performing on itself. In a sense, the *Europudding* is the Continent's answer to the Hollywood package, where the finest art involved is the art of the deal. In Europe, however, these deals bring together a number of vastly different national cultures and markets. And the disparate demands of numerous international partners spread the artistry even thinner.

In a sense, recent technological and legal advances—the development of new satellite and cable services, the establishment of a single ec audio-visual market—have temporarily outpaced Europe's creative capabilities. Brussels' ‘political commitment’ to ec programming is less a cultural mandate than an acknowledgment of that development. It is, however, a situation that no amount of legislation or subsidies will change. With its Directive ‘Television Without Frontiers’, the ec truly laid the foundation for an audio-visual ‘Fortress Europe’. And *Europudding*, when it congeals, will serve nicely as mortar. ■

Robert Altman's *Vincent and Theo*.



VIOLENT CULTURE, VIOLENT TELEVISION

'The IRA are the Irish mafia.'

'The Provos are more of a threat than the Peelers.'

Not, as one might imagine, the outpouring of a beetroot-faced, gravel-voiced Ulster Prod politician, but comments made by two Catholic teenagers in a discussion group, convened in a Belfast hotel, which formed part of a Broadcasting Standards Council study of attitudes to violence in television fiction. We went to the Province to find out how fictional violence is interpreted by viewers living in a culture impregnated by historic images of real violence.

If you live with the gun, do you fear stories in which gunplay takes place, or do you take an inordinate pleasure in such images? A considerable worry, expressed in some circles in the UK, is that television violence reduces viewers' moral response to real-life violence: the violent image, so runs the argument, slides insidiously into the consciousness and undermines the 'normal' rejection of violent solutions. The attitudes of the people in this study of Northern Ireland offer some insight into the validity, or otherwise, of this claim.

The walls of the Bogside, of Shankill, of the Falls Road, are tattooed with images of the Province's past pogroms, battles and conflicts: the colours of arrogance in which icons of William of Orange are painted compete with the chilling pictures of the hunger-striker Bobby Sands; 'No Surrender, 1690' blares stridently across narrow streets and new houses to 'Brits Out' plastered on the same streets and new houses across the divide.

The Province's talented playwrights and writers—Graham Reid (the *Billy* plays, *Ties of Blood*), Anne Devlin (*Naming the Names*), Stewart Parker (*Catchpenny Twist*), Bernard MacLaverty (*Cal*) and Ron Hutchison (*Rat in the Skull*)—explore the meaning of violence in their work; but how are these images understood by the people from whose lives the stories are drawn? Moreover, how do the people of the Province respond to the dramas such as *Harry's Game* or *The Price*, which exploit the Troubles as a conventional thriller backdrop for equally conventional plots?

To answer these questions we went to Belfast and to Lisburn and conducted four viewers' workshops about drama. Furthermore, we interviewed Protestant and Catholic teenagers, two Catholic and two Protestant families, and conducted a representative survey of television viewers in Northern Ireland. The stories, questions and answers supplied by the people with whom we spoke convinced us that one cannot tell a simple story about violent culture and violent television.*

DAVID DOCHERTY & ALISON LYON

All aspects of the Troubles—the blood-feuds, the political crises, the hunger strikes—attract writers, journalists, researchers and dramatists as mosquitos are drawn to warm blood. However, the intractable, long-running and violent nature of the events of the past six hundred years means that it is difficult to produce articles in which clichéd metaphor is not piled upon hoary simile to shore up rickety analysis: when the blood flows red, the prose flows purple. In his book *We Irish*, the literary critic Denis Donoghue, reflecting on the endless rhetorical battle in Ireland, sums up the problem: 'The real trouble is that our national experience has been too limited to be true. Our categories of feeling have been flagrantly limited; our history has at once been intense and monotonous.'

The extreme and the routine are lived simultaneously in Northern Ireland. Although official figures show that over 2,500 people have died and more than 30,000 have been injured in violence spawned by the last twenty-two years of the Troubles, most people, particularly outside the urban working-class archipelagos, see little violence. For many, the world is no less routine than that in

which their mainland counterparts live: the difference is that in the Province the wall between upheaval and habit does, on occasion, come crashing down, and, moreover, the symbols and paraphernalia of violence—the troop convoys, the heavily protected buildings, the guns—are common to everyone.

The attempt to understand the ways in which the people of Ireland think about violence in drama is inescapably caught up in the myths and pain of Ireland's history. Ireland is a date-stamped and place-marked country. The litany is familiar: Ulster, 1641; Drogheda, 1649; the Boyne, 1690; Wolfe Tone's rebellion, 1798; Dublin, Easter 1916; the Civil War, 1922.

The Troubles re-emerged in 1968, when civil rights marchers were blocked at Armagh by Ian Paisley and when, in August 1969, the British Army marched into Derry. New names, new dates, new deaths: January 1972, 'Bloody Sunday', 13 Catholics are killed by the Army; July, 1972, 'Bloody Friday', 11 people die when the Provisional IRA set off 26 bombs; 1981, Bobby Sands and nine other Republican prisoners die on hunger strike; 1983, the Irish National Liberation Army fires indiscriminately into a church congregation in Darkley; 1987, 11 killed and 63 injured when a bomb explodes before a Remembrance Day ceremony in Enniskillen; 1988, three members of an IRA active service unit are shot dead in Gibraltar, three mourners at the funerals of those shot dead are killed by a Protestant gunman, two soldiers are set upon, brutalised and assassinated at the funerals of those murdered at the earlier funeral of the Gibraltar dead.

Five years ago, in an interview for *City Limits*, the Catholic playwright Seamus Finnegan castigated the BBC and some of his fellow writers for their commitment to 'balance'. 'I don't wish to bad mouth other writers but Stewart Parker's stuff for the television epitomises "BBC balance". If you see the UDA club, you're sure to see the IRA club. The overall theme is "Isn't violence awful?" and in a crass, liberal way Parker, Bill Morrison and certainly Graham Reid, being of Protestant working-class

*The study was reported in David Docherty's *Public Opinion and Broadcasting Standards: Violence in Television Fiction* (John Libbey/Broadcasting Standards Council, 1990).



Harry's Game: 'The symbols and paraphernalia of violence . . . are common to everyone.'

background, bend over backwards to be as English and as liberal as possible because their grouping is seen by the English as being narrow and bigoted. They want to imply: "We're not like those people." It's the psychological equivalent of moving out of the Shankill and starting to call the scullery the "working kitchen". That's why until Ron Hutchinson's stage play *Rat in the Skull* you hadn't had the Protestant play, one that forgets apologies, balance and being liberal. One that says directly, this is what I come from.'

Rat in the Skull, which was transmitted by the BBC in 1987, encapsulates the problem of telling the British a story about Northern Ireland. The play takes place in an English gaol. The cast consists of an IRA suspect, an RUC interrogator, an English police superintendent, whose task is to see that the interrogation is carried out lawfully and fairly, and an anti-Irish police constable. Both policemen dislike and are baffled by the bond of violence between the Irishmen—only the interrogator and his prisoner comprehend and share the struggle. As we shall see, the people of Northern Ireland are suspicious of plays about the Province which are broadcast to the rest of the UK.

The problem with drama from the Province is that the people of the mainland remain bemused and confused by Ireland. The British television networks seem, understandably, to prefer stories which use the Troubles as a background for the exploration of psychological themes, rather than commission drama which addresses the underlying reasons for the crisis and which appears to speak directly, and without apology, out of the hatred and ambitions of the

terrorists and their supporters. However, as the two quotes at the beginning of this article demonstrate, it is not always easy to typecast the points of view of the Protestant and Catholic communities.

In his play *Spokesong*, Stewart Parker captures the essence of the questions posed by the research. His principal character, Frank Stock, is shocked by the bombings of the early 1970s, and is even more troubled when his schoolteacher girlfriend, Daisy, tells him that one of her pupils has just explained to her how to make a car-bomb:

DAISY: . . . It's beginning to get rather foolish, me standing up there saying, 'Now, class, open your books at the War of the Roses . . .' and them fresh in from stoning soldiers, and setting fire to shops. They've already got more history than they can cope with out in the streets.

FRANK: That's not history, that's depraved folklore . . . bogeyman stories.

DAISY: It's got more appeal than the truth, Frank, whatever it is.

On three occasions—once for Channel 4 and twice for the Broadcasting Standards Council—we have travelled to Northern Ireland to interview viewers, recruited by an independent market research agency, about how television should record the violence on the streets. On each trip, people have explained to us that they feel excluded by broadcasters. Those whom we interviewed were not merely enraged by the failure of the media to allow a genuine expression of Catholic or Protestant attitudes; they were angry also at the ways in which the media exploit the

Troubles and portray the people of the Province as violent thugs.

The following comments from a group of Belfast Catholic women, whom we interviewed for Channel 4, represent the majority opinion.

—I would say that the extremists on both sides have a voice . . .

—But the ordinary (people), the majority of people . . .

—Yes, the majority of people don't . . .

—There is no such thing as representation. You see, every Catholic is not a Nationalist and every Protestant is not an Orangeman.

Although the BBC has broadcast several dozen plays about Northern Ireland since Stewart Parker's *Catchpenny Twist*, Graham Reid's quartet the *Billy* plays seem to hold a special place in the folk-memory. Reid, a Belfast Protestant and formerly a British soldier, wrote memorably and movingly about the struggle within a Belfast working-class family. In particular, he focused on the relationship between a father, Norman Martin, and his teenage son Billy, and on their failure to achieve or express love. Although Billy's girlfriend is a Roman Catholic, politics and the Troubles are seldom addressed in the plays.

Reid captures an aspect of Belfast life which has been hidden by the blood, bombs and bullets: Belfast, like Glasgow or Newcastle, is a hard, Northern city, built on heavy industry. Consequently, despite its unique political problems, it shares many aspects of the tough, working-class culture which characterised many Northern and Scottish cities after the Industrial Revolution.

The myth around which the *Billy*

plays are organised is that of the hard man: the heavy drinker, the fighter, the one who earns respect with his fists, the individualist. Reid explores the inability of such men to break out of the roles created for them by their culture. The plays could have been set in any Northern working-class family of thirty years ago—before the collapse of heavy industry in the North and Scotland. However, Reid's exploration, and to a considerable extent celebration, of the hard man is all the more powerful because to be a hard man, according to Reid, is to reject participation in the Troubles.

Reid portrays the UDA as credulous children who play at soldiers. Billy and Norman, for all their faults, are real men—tough and sceptical. (Although no over-arching political theme emerges in the plays, there is a longing for change and a sense that salvation appears from outside Belfast. At the conclusion of the plays, Norman lives in some comfort in England and is 'civilised' by a middle-class Englishwoman.)

The *Billy* plays exercise a fascination for many Protestants in Northern Ireland, as some of the following comments demonstrate.

—I loved the *Billy* plays because it was just us; even the language, 'Ma' and 'Da', I can hear them now, but I would hate that to be shown in England. We had a laugh at the goings on, with (Billy's girlfriend) being from the other side, but it's all right for us to laugh at ourselves.

This theme of hiding Ireland from England's gaze cropped up among Protestant women in our discussions about Channel 4. The *Billy* plays represented the depressing side of life in Belfast:

—It is always the worst part—it is always a family in a small house, lots of arguments, lots of problems, it never ends in a nice sort of ordinary family.

—They are always showing wee back streets in Belfast, they never show the nice parts of Northern Ireland.

A more ambivalent response emerged in a working-class Protestant family, as the following conversation between the father and mother reveals:

—Nobody has made a programme about what Belfast really is . . .

—Everybody thought that we were going around murdering people, we weren't, we were just going to work . . .

—They've banned Sinn Féin now—they should have banned it all from the start, and the whole thing would have been knocked on the head . . .

A similar cautious response emerged when the couple criticised some of the more famous dramatic representations of the North:

—The *Billy* programmes were not really about the Troubles. It was just the way people talk.

—*Cal* was a bit far-fetched. He is supposed to be a terrorist and he gets a guilty conscience and goes back to see his wife and they become lovers. I just couldn't see that happening . . . They had some English actors in it and even them trying to do a Belfast accent—they just couldn't.

The Catholics, on the other hand, were less certain about the representation of the Province in plays. One Catholic teenager noted:

—The likes of those *Billy* programmes. It was all about the other side, 'cos our side aren't allowed to talk or nothing.

However, an older Catholic group remarked:

—The *Billy* plays were very good. They showed both sides.

This group expressed a fear similar to their Protestant counterparts that the violence is too prominent:

—Northern Ireland is the best country in the world.

—Everyone gets and watches programmes about Northern Ireland. People in Canada were saying to me—'You go over to Northern Ireland and you come back in a box.'

—It's time to show the good things.

Although unease and uncertainty

about the representation of violence persists in both communities, the prevailing aesthetic supports naturalism in drama and a realistic portrayal of the seamier side of life. This view prevailed when the groups reflected on, for example, drug addiction or gang-fights. In a Catholic group, one person noted:

—I'd show the guy taking drugs, with the needle and that, because it's everyday life. You see these people on the streets. I'd show it to warn people off, to show what kind of mess you could end up in.

Similar thoughts emerged in a Protestant group:

—The people that were into it would know how to take them, but I don't think that showing hard drugs in a film would make anyone think: 'Oh, I'll go and get some.' They'd start through their friends, not the TV.

Who Bombed Birmingham?, Granada's drama-documentary about the Birmingham Six.



Drama about the Troubles retained the support of most people if it not only portrayed the violence, but contained some kind of moral. A Protestant teenager commented:

—If you showed them doing it (getting involved in gang fights), then it might put young people off from the start, rather than becoming involved in it.

A middle-class respondent expressed a widely held point of view:

—If they're doing a programme about Irish people and local people, for Northern Ireland, it has to feature the Troubles, because that is the way of life that is going on here.

A Catholic man expressed his anger at the lack of realism in many dramas:

—It's not like they say it. The police pull you in and kick the shit out of you. You want to see the reality, the truth, what goes on. Nothing, I would say on television, is too violent.

A Catholic teenager stated simply:

—I'd just like to see something that's true to the way we're living.

Most of the discussion returned again and again to three issues: first, that drama should round out the picture of Northern Ireland for the rest of the UK; second, that the violence associated with the Troubles has to be portrayed; but, third, that although the people we spoke to argued they can cope with images of violence, they were ambivalent about such stories being shown to uncomprehending people on the mainland. The symbiotic relationship portrayed in *Rat in the Skull* finds its echoes even in the interpretation of drama.

Despite the many and complex differences of opinion, there was unanimity on one point: everyone loathed thrillers or films which exploited the Troubles as a backdrop. The fakery, the lousy accents,

the lack of moral accountability and the sleazy appropriation of culture repulsed viewers in Northern Ireland. However, although viewers rejected violent entertainment when it was set in Northern Ireland, most were untroubled by, and many dismissive of, such images as they appear in British or American crime series. Most of the people with whom we discussed this issue were fairly certain that many images of violence could be entertaining.

In a sense, the most surprising point about television and the Troubles is that the extraordinary combination of the mundane and the murderous appears not to create a simple set of responses to television violence: viewers in Northern Ireland are neither more bloodthirsty nor more censorious than people living in Britain.

Many of those who took part in the Northern Ireland study attributed to themselves almost a macho style of interpretation. 'Look,' they seemed to be saying, 'we live with the real stuff, the rest of it is just toy guns and small games.' Quite a few people noted that they no longer could be shocked by killings, knee-cappings or maiming: dazed by real violence, a number felt that television violence on the news, in documentaries and in fiction was, simply, irrelevant. However, despite this self-proclaimed interpretative toughness, when these viewers were talking about television fiction in general, their views were little different from those expressed on the mainland.

As part of the BSC's investigation of attitudes to fictional violence, a representative sample of more than 1,000 people in Britain, and 157 in Northern Ireland, were invited to take part in a national opinion survey. The results revealed virtually no difference in attitudes across the Irish Sea. For example, 28 per cent of people in Britain said that they enjoyed violent films about Vietnam, 28 per cent enjoyed modern horror films and 36 per cent films about the Mafia. For Northern Ireland, the figures were 31, 26 and 40 per cent.

That there is no difference between people who live in a culture saturated with memories of violence, and another culture in which most violent acts are, simply, criminal should surprise us only if we possess a simple model of the ways in which viewers make sense of television. *Miami Vice* and *Rat in the Skull* may both contain violent interrogation scenes, but they demand different levels of interpretation. Simplistic, amusing, facile violence calls forth simplistic, amused or facile evaluations; whereas, violence in plays which claim to speak for or about Northern Ireland calls for deep judgments about the truth, validity and power of the play. The people of Northern Ireland may be heirs to six hundred years of struggle, but they are no more likely to see television through red-tinted glasses than the rest of us. There is no simple story to tell about violent culture and violent television. ■

Fictions of violence. Top: *Cal*. Below: *The Price*.



-F R A M E D-

Philip French

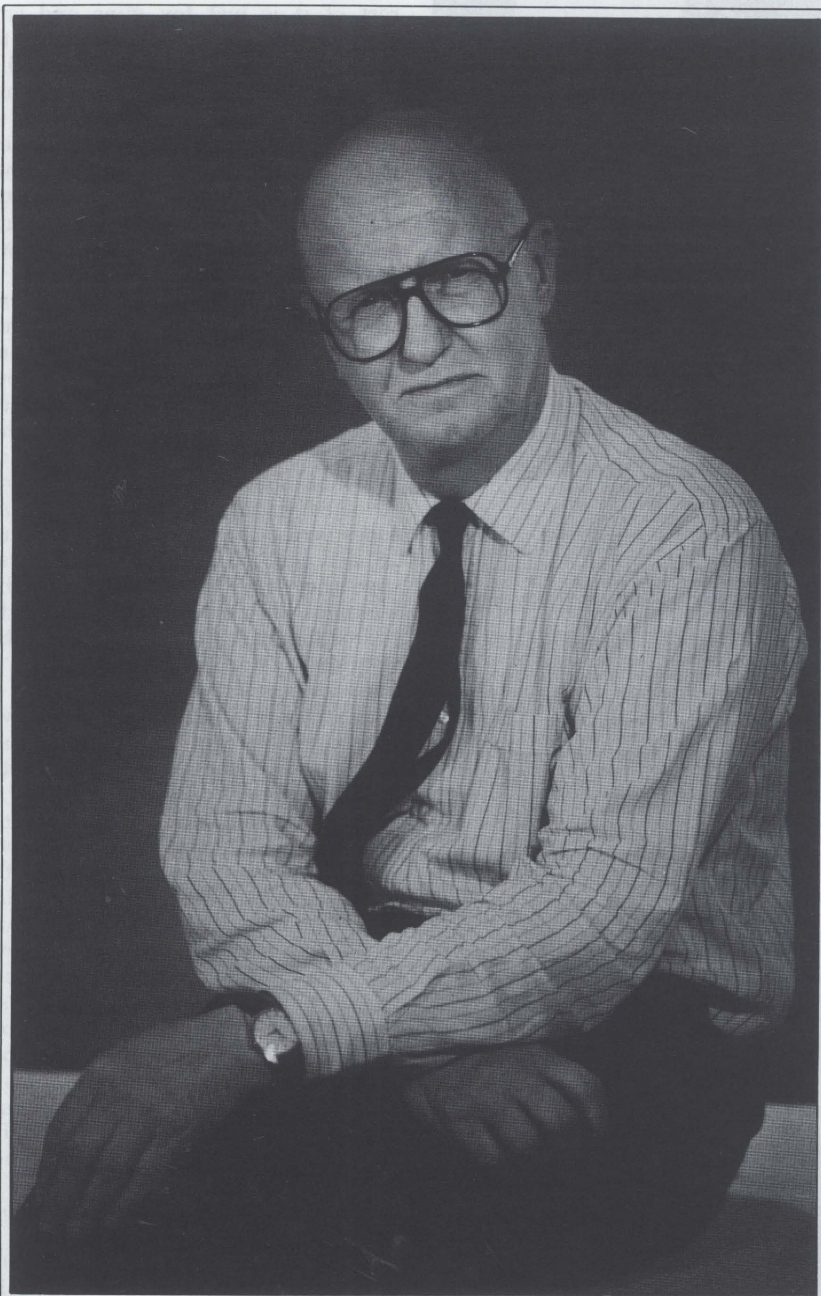


PHOTO SARAH QUILL

At a now legendary meeting during the dark days of the Hollywood anti-communist witchhunts, John Ford rose to denounce Cecil B. DeMille. 'My name is John Ford,' he announced. 'I make Westerns.' I suspect that my father might introduce himself in a similarly laconic fashion: 'My name is Philip French. I like Westerns.' His own book on the subject began with a series of epigraphs, the last of which was the most personal. It was an extract from Walker Percy's novel, *The Moviegoer*:

'Other people, so I have read, treasure memorable moments in their lives: the time one climbed the Parthenon at sunrise, the summer night one met a lonely girl in Central Park and achieved with her a sweet and natural relationship, as they say in books. I too once met a girl in Central Park, but it is not much to remember. What I remember is the time John Wayne killed three men with a carbine as he was falling to the dusty street in *Stagecoach*, and the time the kitten found Orson Welles in the doorway in *The Third Man*.'

It is sometimes tempting to see Philip (as I shall henceforward call him for reasons of convenience) as a character half in the movie world, like those figures in David Thomson's novels who stumble out of classic movies into the disorder of real life. For example, I have wondered for years why he is apparently the only person left in London who answers the phone by announcing the old letter prefix of his phone number, Gulliver, as it used to be back in the 1960s. But then I saw the recent revival of *Pierrot le Fou* in which Jean-Paul Belmondo remains attached to his obsolete phone prefix, Balzac, to the extent that he is unable to phone his family back in Paris because the telephone operator doesn't recognise it. Thom Gunn wrote of Elvis Presley that he 'turns revolt into a style'. Philip turns nostalgia into a cinematic *hommage*.

It is also tempting to describe his appearance in similar terms. He recalls his parents' friends thinking that his father looked like William Powell in the *Thin Man* films. He adds, however, that the resemblance is so tenuous that it can only have been because he drank as much as Nick Charles, though unhappily not to the same suave effect. Philip himself was photographed in 1967 for the cover of his first book, *The Movie Moguls*, wearing a donkey jacket and with a cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth, like a surly extra from *On the Waterfront*. However he assures me that his appearance was actually meant to suggest Jean-Luc Godard.

In the early 70s Philip's appearance was changed drastically by the onset of alopecia, a condition that causes hair loss. Philip himself then circulated the canard that his children had christened him 'Radio Savalas' (his day job from 1959 until July of this year was as a BBC

radio producer). In fact, Philip has never much cared for being described as Kojak, not through sensitivity to his baldness but because Telly Savalas is not an actor who interests him much.

Within our family we consider Yul Brynner too easy a comparison, and besides, he used to shave his head—or claimed he did—so he doesn't really count. Philip's true cinematic doppelganger is the slightly obscure Robert Tessier. Freud referred to the legend that if you ever encounter your doppelganger you will die, and in the case of Tessier this may well be true since he specialises in playing murderous psychopaths in such fine films as (to give their American titles) Walter Hill's *Hard Times* and Robert Aldrich's *The Longest Yard*.

Philip was born in 1933 in Liverpool and grew up mainly there and in Bristol, where his father worked for the Pearl Insurance company. He was thus part of that provincial generation who experienced the war, rationing, austerity, national service and whose idea of glamour and vitality came to be represented by America. And America was represented by its consumer products, its jazz music (just as sexual intercourse began in 1963, rather too late for Philip Larkin, rock and roll began in 1956, rather too late for Philip French) and, above all, its films. He began by adoring Hollywood films. Then in his teens, when he began to read books on the subject by commentators such as Paul Rotha, he moved on to what were then considered more respectable art films. The re-acceptance of Hollywood was to come later—though he never stopped watching the films.

After Oxford and a year at Indiana University (where he got married in the county courthouse that is the setting for the marriage in Peter Yates' *Breaking Away*), Philip's formative period as a film critic was spent—in his spare time—writing essays for *SIGHT AND SOUND* and *Movie*, as well as titles that either no longer exist or are scarcely known for their commitment to the cinema—*20th Century*, *London Magazine*, *Encounter*. He was part of what could be seen as a second, or even third, new wave of criticism. Godard, Truffaut and others had reclaimed Hollywood cinema in their criticism and reworked it in their films. The British film magazines that mattered were responding to these developments and to what also seemed like the exciting possibilities for the British cinema, which was partly the work of the previous generation of film critics—Lindsay Anderson, Karel Reisz, Gavin Lambert.

But I was aware of none of that at the time. Other people may remember nannies and traumas from their early life. My first memories are of fragments of films in cinemas that no longer exist. *Broken Lance* at the Astoria, Finsbury Park, numerous movies at the Odeon Highgate, of which the red metal 'O' in my parents' dining room is all that

survives. I was given nightmares by the flying monkeys in *The Wizard of Oz* and by the wicked queen in *Snow White* (I don't believe Woody Allen in *Annie Hall* when he says he fell in love with her as a child—that's an adult response). And at the age of four I decided I disliked Jerry Lewis and I have seen no reason to change my mind since.

The American critic Dwight Macdonald was appalled by intellectuals who interested themselves in popular culture, and he certainly wouldn't have approved of our family, in which the children were ordered to see certain films and mealtime conversation consisted—as it still largely does—of obscure film trivia facts and questions.

Some people may think of Philip as a career film critic, but it was only in 1977 that he took the job full time for the *Observer*. Before that he had only stood in occasionally both there and at *The Times*—largely because the BBC was unwilling to permit staff members to take employment outside the Corporation. Of his stint at the *Observer*, Philip has observed: 'For some film critics, seeing the films is the price they pay for writing about them. For me, it's the other way round.'

What are Philip's particular qualities as a critic? Philip Oakes caught a couple of them in his novel in which there is a perfunctorily disguised character called Philip Finlay, a BBC producer and film critic with an encyclopaedic memory and a propensity for puns. But Oakes doesn't capture the flamboyance of his memory for facts or the mischief of his humour.

One of his virtuoso tricks, often demonstrated, is writing detailed obituaries, full of dates and cross-references, at short notice at his holiday home in Sweden without the aid of a single reference book. He is also notorious for beginning his column by showing, say, that the character names of the latest slasher movie actually derive from the editorial board of *Partisan Review* in the late 40s. While preparing this article, I suggested that he has a tendency to overrate films he finds intellectually interesting and he agreed. And I believe it is fair to say that he treats any new Western with that loving tenderness that a naturalist would accord to the last frail remnant of a species tottering on the brink of extinction.

Nor can he resist a good joke. I remember his capsule review for a TV screening of Anthony Mann's *Fall of the Roman Empire*, in which he said that though visually stunning 'the script suggests more five gibbons and a typewriter than one Gibbon and a book,' the humour of which was only slightly diminished when I finally saw the film and thought the script rather good. An anthology of one-liners could be culled from his reviews and table-talk. One which I don't believe has ever seen print before is a song-title for a musical version of *The Elephant Man*, presum-

ably to be sung by Liza Minnelli, 'I Was Born with a Trunk'.

Observer readers have not always understood his sense of humour. When reviewing *Butch and Sundance: The Early Days* he lamented the new coinage 'prequel', and then continued, 'Hopefully only those disinterested in language will be offended...' A flood of letters arrived pointing out his 'mistakes' including one from a school-teacher who said he was using it as an example of illiteracy for his English class. Philip replied explaining the man's error but then adding that he could continue to use the extract 'as an example of misunderstood irony'.

Philip's career as a BBC radio producer has been important to him in two ways. It has helped him to maintain a discreet separation from the film publicity world. Practical considerations have made him unable to accept invitations to meet the star currently passing through or visit the film currently in production, the sort of contact which he believes inescapably compromises the critic.

Much of his time as a talks producer at the Third Programme, as he has continued to call it, years after it became Radio Three, was spent producing the weekly arts review programme, *Critics' Forum*. This reflects the wider cultural influences which he sees as crucial to what he brings to his film reviewing. It also explains why some of his film reviews can take so long getting round to a particular film, or even to the cinema in general.

Certainly his principal career as a broadcaster has cut him off to some extent from the film critical fraternity. Occasionally relations have even become rather strained. Once when Derek Malcolm was featured on a local radio phone-in, Philip phoned up as Neville Phillips (Neville is his middle name) of Kentish Town and harried him with absurd questions in a ludicrous accent. Malcolm suspected what was going on and revenged himself at the next Edinburgh film festival. At a reception he told a well-known film actor (entirely inaccurately) that Philip was a great connoisseur of the cannabis weed. The result was that the actor spent the rest of the evening passing large and in-criminating spliffs to a deeply discomforted and mysteriously resistant BBC producer and film critic.

Has this film-saturated life produced any grudges against my father? There is one. A couple of years ago I wrote in my *New Statesman* column about attending a football match at Arsenal with my father when I was in my teens. At the end a crowd surge tore us apart. As the mass carried him away he shouted at me across a forest of heads: 'This is like the last scene of *Les Enfants du Paradis*.'

I thought it was funny, but it got me into Pseudos Corner.

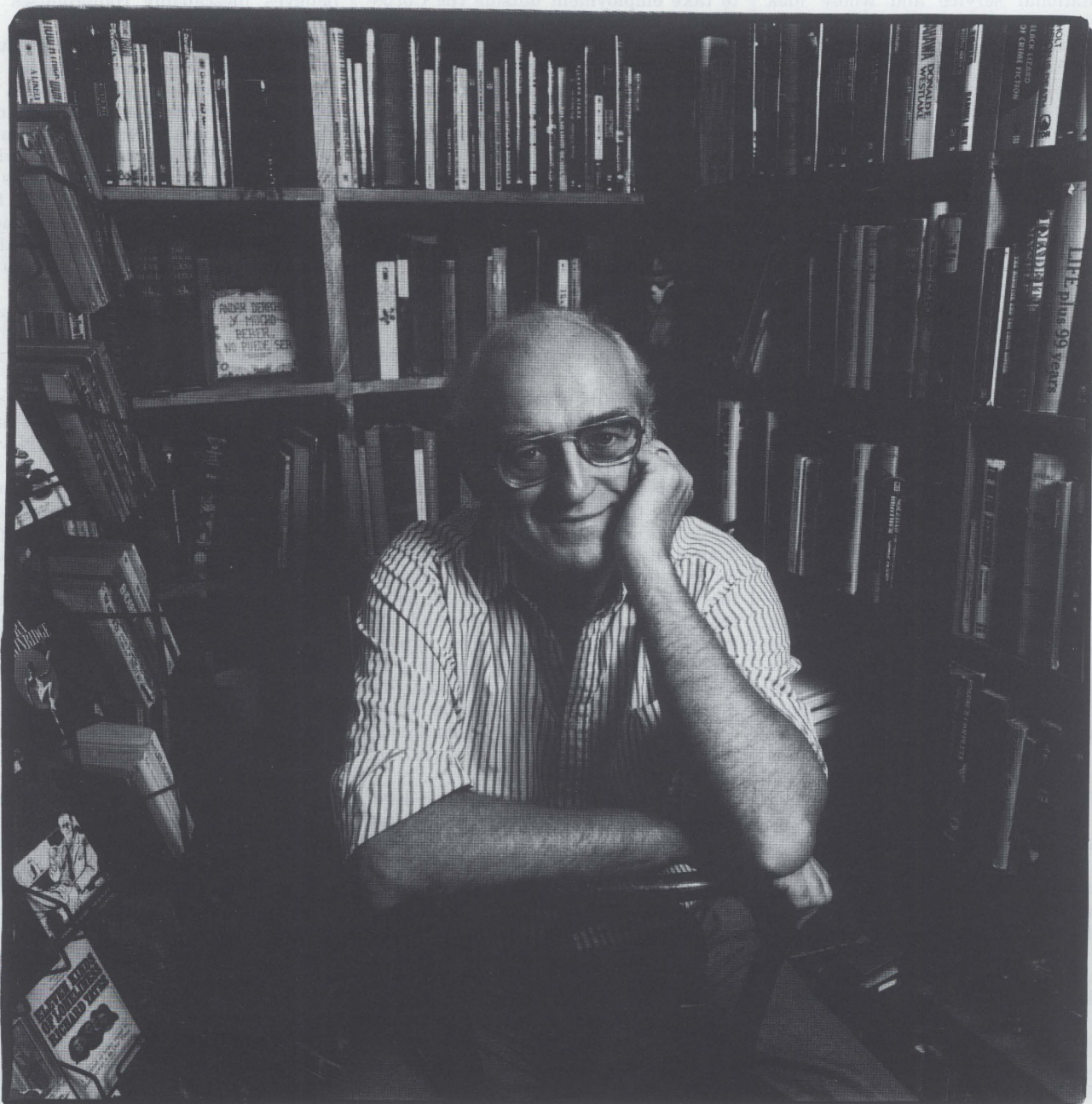
SEAN FRENCH

P A T M c G I L L I G A N

DONALD WESTLAKE

A N D

THE GRIFTERS



Donald Westlake. Photo: William B. Winburn.

Several years ago, Stephen Frears and Volker Schlöndorff met at the Telluride Film Festival in Colorado. Frears confided that he was having trouble finding a scriptwriter for *The Grifters*, a Jim Thompson novel he was adapting for the screen. Schlöndorff suggested Donald Westlake: he had been working with him and 'having a lot of fun'. Frears liked the idea of fun, but thought Westlake too much of a comedy writer for this script. Then, on Schlöndorff's recommendation, he saw *The Stepfather*, the 1987 film about a psycho-killer from an original story and screenplay by Westlake. Ah, Frears realised: Westlake didn't write that; Richard Stark did.

Frears knew that Stark (one of Westlake's several pen names, though somewhat retired since 1974) could be grim and lowdown. These days Westlake is better known as America's chief comic crime novelist. But, as he says, 'a good wallow can be fun too.' So Westlake's job in adapting *The Grifters*, the new film produced by Martin Scorsese and directed by Stephen Frears, was to be faithful to Jim Thompson, to resurrect the Stark in himself and to have fun wallowing.

This is the season of Jim Thompson. There have been several magazine articles, at least two biographies are forthcoming and Vintage, a division of Random House, has scheduled a paperback reissue of Thompson titles (including the Berkeley-based Black Lizard catalogue that ignited the Thompson boom a couple of years ago). And Hollywood is in step, with Maggie Greenwald's *The Kill-Off* (from a book published in 1957) and James Foley's *After Dark, My Love* (a 1955 title). Several other Thompsons are said to be in advanced stages of development.

'All of a sudden, everything of his that has not been made before is under option,' said Westlake. 'His moment has come. It's perfectly appropriate to him, that his fifteen minutes of fame should come thirteen years after his death. That's a Jim Thompson thing.'

Thompson died in April 1977, but his reputation as 'the best suspense writer going, bar none' (*New York Times*) has been snowballing. Thompson came out of hard-scrabble roots in Anadarko, Oklahoma and, after knocking around in everything from burlesque to lumber-jacking, he began to churn out thrillers for low-budget paperback houses. His existential pulp—depraved killers, twisted family plots, street lingo—has found an international cult following.

Thompson's dead-end view of life, one of the constant motifs of his books, might be summed up in this passage from *The Grifters*: 'To do the best one could, and accept things as they were. Usually, they did not seem so bad after a while: if they were not actually good,

then they became so by virtue of the many things that were worse. Almost everything was relatively good. Eating was better than starving, living better than dying.'

Some years ago, a professor in Colorado wrote an article citing *The Grifters* (1963) as an overlooked diamond-in-the-rough that would make a terrific film. Word reached Martin Scorsese, who had decided to branch out into producing. Frears (this was before *Dangerous Liaisons*) joined up with Scorsese.

Initially, Westlake had to be persuaded that he wouldn't simply find it too depressing to spend some time in Thompson's dark imagination. *The Grifters* is typically raw: a white trash mother and son saga, overripe with blood and greed and incest. Frears suggested that Westlake look at it from the point of view of the struggling son rather than that of the doomed mother. See it as a story of at least a little hope.

'The only book of Thompson's that I didn't like,' Westlake says, 'is the one everyone thinks is the best, *The Killer*

seriously intended novelist who was in the wrong place at the wrong time. The Depression robbed him of the college education that he needed. He was this lost figure out there—which is what his characters are. But he was writing from the guts—too fast, but from the guts. Because of the Depression, because of his personality, his drinking, his family, he couldn't do anything but keep slogging away. Still, he managed to do almost exclusively stuff that came from within. He would distort it. He's really telling a story about tangled emotions between a mother and son, but he puts them both in the mob. That's for them, but the story is for him. And the fact that they're both in the mob does turn the crank a little bit, make it a little hard and a little tired ...'

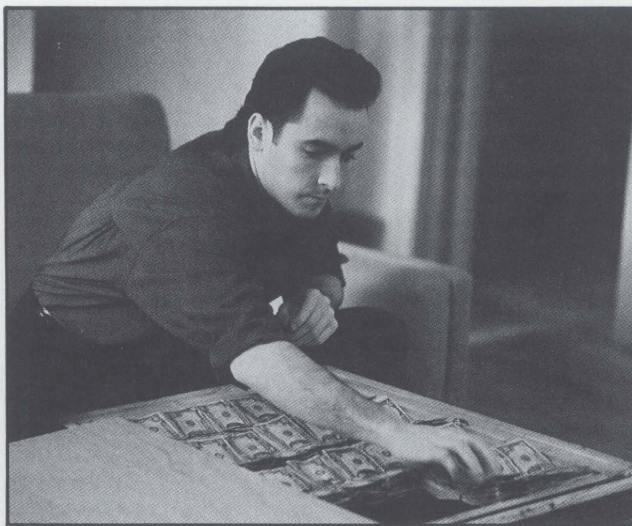
After Frears and Westlake shook hands, a couple of years went by. There was a writers' strike; there was 'corporate hugger-mugger' (Westlake's words) that took the picture to Universal, and Frears directed *Dangerous Liaisons*. 'Apparently Stephen had become a hot property as a result of these delays. Partly because the producers wanted to prove their earnestness to him, and also because they wanted to capture his interest, they laid on a location scouting trip to Los Angeles for Stephen and me.

'I had been there often, but Stephen had not. If he did *The Grifters*, it would be his first American movie, and for an Englishman, there's nothing more quintessentially American than Los Angeles. In fact, I went a little out of my way to show him something I knew he would love. Part of the film is set in La Jolla; so we took the train to Del Mar, then rented a car and drove down to La Jolla,

then back up to Los Angeles. In driving to La Jolla, I took us several blocks out of the way to show him Raymond Chandler's house, because the English love Chandler. He got out of the car and looked at it from every angle. It was an enjoyable trip and it cemented things a lot, including how we got along with each other.

'As we were driving back, he said, "You know I do like the writer on the set." I said, "Oh, you mean, you want me out here while you're filming?" He said yes. This is what members of the Writers Guild are screaming for all the time, but my reaction was you want me on the set?' (As readers of Westlake well know, New York is preferable to California; and anywhere is preferable to the flim-flammy of Hollywood.) 'There was a compromise reached and I was there for the last week of rehearsal, the first three weeks of filming and the last week and a half of filming.'

The principals were settled as Anjelica Huston (who was cast before her double score of *Crimes and Misdemeanors* and



John Cusack in *The Grifters*.

Inside Me. That one I have never quite warmed up to. But some of the others are good, and *The Grifters* is very good. I don't know if he could have been any better than he was. He was usually doing stuff for too little money in shabby little secondary markets, and too fast. Every one of his books was published at least one draft too soon, so there is lumpy, undigested stuff in them. He would not have had the time or impetus to go back and smooth things out and get it right—he had to get it down, send it in, get his \$2,000 and pay the rent.

'I had done some of that in my early days, so I know what you tend to do. You're going along until you get to the point where you say, "Oh, my gosh, this story isn't going to work unless she was married before ..." You can go back to where you should have done it in the first place. Or you can just stick it in: "She was married before ..." and keep going. That's what he does. My first job with *The Grifters* was to untangle all the knots and lay the story out.

'I think he thought of himself as a

Enemies, A Love Story), John Cusack and Annette Benning. The decision was made to avoid 'period' decor. 'There's no problem with updating Thompson because his people only live in a very narrow world with each other. Their whole interest is the emotional struggle between them. To update it, all you have to do is take their hats off.'

Instead of finding the experience depressing, Westlake enjoyed the process of adapting Thompson. 'There's a phrase when you're trying to avoid being too obvious or banal: "Too much on the money." That's what I was trying for—to get right absolutely in the centre of the nailhead and hit it. I wanted to do damage on every page. Normally I would wonder if there wasn't a more elegant way to do dialogue, or a more indirect way . . . Not on this one. If the mother gets her son to the hospital and rescues him, and the grudging son says, "I guess I owe you my life . . ." In this script she answers, "You always did".'

There was still a lot of fine-tuning on the set. 'People say, "Oh, you write such realistic dialogue." It might look realistic, but then you have somebody say it aloud and you realise there are nine too many words in that sentence, or the sound of it is all wrong. I know there was one line of Anjelica's that was just too long and too stupid. She was struggling with it, doing her job. Almost always, if I was going to talk to one of the actors I would ask Stephen first. There has to be a line of authority. I said to her, "Sorry, this is my fault. I've given you a rotten line here. Let's see what we can do . . ."

'Another time, late in the filming, we were doing a three-page scene which in the script seemed perfectly sensible. But I realised that we'd already covered everything in the scene and some of it was just posturing. While they were setting up the lighting, I grabbed the script and I cut a page and a half out of it. I called Stephen over, and my wife and I read him the new version. We were doing that sort of thing all along the way.'

Meanwhile, according to Westlake, Scorsese behaved as a kind of ideal, *laissez faire* producer. 'I believe the dailies or rushes (I always forget what to call them) were sent to New York pretty constantly. He always wanted to see chunks of the film, and was always pleased by what was happening.'

For more than twenty years, Westlake's—and Stark's—novels have attracted Hollywood producers. There have been some extremely good films made from them (the sledgehammer noir of *Point Blank*; the cool caper of *The Hot Rock*), some indifferent ones, and—one oddity—several films with different actors playing the same people (his bungling burglar Dortmund and gang, who are continuing Westlake

characters). They are almost never adapted by Westlake himself, and some of them he can't vouch for. 'Three pictures of mine I've never seen, *The Bank Shot*, *Slayground*, *Jimmy the Kid*.'

Growing up, Westlake loved movies, and he sprinkles his conversation with quotes from the films of Preston Sturges: ('I view the entire proceedings with a sense of gloomy foreboding'). His books are patently 'cinematic'—along with funny dialogue and intricate plotting, he specialises in scenes of 'visual misdirection', where you think someone is doing one thing and when the angle is shifted slightly you realise they are actually doing something else. But Westlake hesitates to say how much his fiction has been influenced by films.

In fact, Westlake got his start, most improbably, by writing an unauthorised star biography, the life story of Elizabeth Taylor under the *nom de plume* of John B. Allan. 'That was a true cut-and-paste in the early 1960s. I was just starting out and my first agent was a big *schlockmeister*. Little assignments

they're closer to where my mind tends to go anyway.'

Though much in demand as a scriptwriter, Westlake has taken the usual body blows. TV deals have gone awry; he tried to take his name off a film adaptation of one of his novels (*Why Me?*), when the producers switched the locale from New York to Los Angeles and heavily reworked the script ('Since then, I've developed my theory that David Hockney is the only thing that has ever been improved by being moved to Los Angeles'); the long time he spent working with Volker Schlöndorff on an adaptation of Eric Ambler's *Passage to Arms* came to nothing when Orion backed down.

But Westlake remains a novelist first. Roughly seventy books so far, and he still averages at least one a year.

While we were talking, a telephone call came from Stephen Frears in London. Frears had sent Westlake the videotape of a work print of *The Grifters*. Westlake had spotted a couple of glitches that could be fixed with pieces of dialogue or editing. They consulted, and Westlake returned to our conversation.

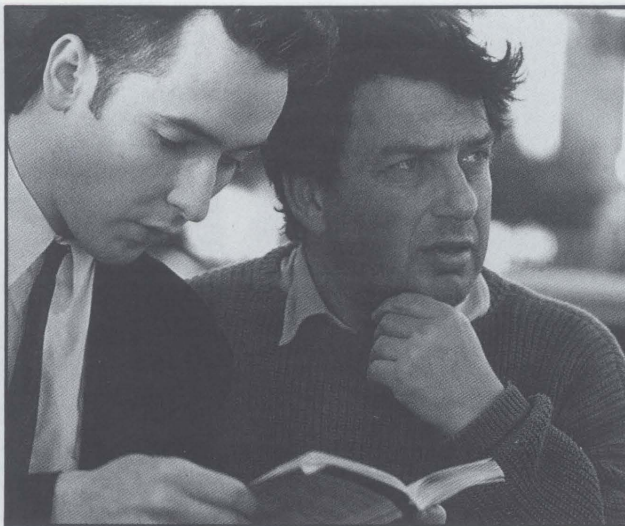
'I have an astonishing relationship with this film and with Frears and it has clearly ruined me for the movie business for the rest of my life. Stephen behaves as though we are partners making a movie. He's the partner who stands out front like in a store and deals with everybody, but when we go into the office, we're partners. I've never had that.'

With giddy satisfaction, Westlake relates how, towards the end of filming in California, there was a scene with an especially appropriate line of dialogue. After he had called 'cut', Frears asked, 'Is that you or

Thompson?' Westlake replied, 'That's me.' 'Uh-huh, okay,' Frears said, 'I'm figuring out which of you is which . . .'

Or was it Stark? 'He hits hard too,' agreed Westlake. 'I have to tell you my favourite Richard Stark line. In one of the books, the character Parker is being bedevilled by somebody. A message is brought to him. Parker gets annoyed. The guy says, "I'm only the messenger." Parker shoots him and says, "Now you're the message." That's in a Jim Thompson vein.'

Among Thompson adaptations, Sam Peckinpah's *The Getaway* (1972) has its devotees, and Bertrand Tavernier's *Coup de Torchon* (transposed from *Pop. 1280*) is justifiably acclaimed. All the same, 'I think we are getting Thompson's soul on the screen for the first time,' said Westlake. 'The closest before was *Coup de Torchon*, but that soul was Gallic. Thompson is hard because he isn't upbeat, and the best you can hope from him is: we can survive. I think we got that—the surviving against odds and the off-kilter view of life—in *The Grifters*.'



John Cusack with Stephen Frears.

would come along. "Would you do this: biography of Elizabeth Taylor?" Sure, why not. It just means going to the library and doing research. Then they asked me to do Gary Cooper. About two weeks later, I hadn't quite started yet, Cooper died. I called my agent and said: forget it. "But now that he's dead," said my agent, "it's even better!" Exactly. "I'm not a vulture on a branch," I said. That was the end of it.'

For many years, in the 1960s and early 70s, Westlake wrote as Tucker Coe or Richard Stark. His reputation for harsh crime thrillers was imperilled when one of his books, *The Fugitive Pigeon*, came out funny. His agent warned him that he would lose foreign sales because American comedy doesn't travel well; he wouldn't get paperback revenue, his income would be cut in half. 'I said, "Well, I'll do just this one." It sold twice as many copies as the previous books. It did sell to paperback. It did well in Europe. And I was enjoying myself. Stark is more external. It's hard to speak of comic novels as being the essential self, but I guess

Mary Astor



When I think of Mary Astor, which is quite often, that prayer that was recited over our heads at College comes into my mind. 'Lord,' (or some such) 'who has granted that when two or three are gathered together in Thy Name, Thou wilt grant their requests . . . ' And I have thought how strange it is, and how indisputable, that when two or three who love the cinema are gathered together, the name of Mary Astor always comes up, and everybody agrees that she was an actress of special attraction, whose qualities of depth and reality always seemed

—BY—
Lindsay Anderson

to illuminate the parts she played. And all this in spite of—or because of—the fact that she was never exactly a star.

I suppose the parts for which she was most famous came from the 1930s and 40s. And of these, the most celebrated was undoubtedly John Huston's debut picture, *The Maltese Falcon*. She herself wrote of Brigid O'Shaughnessy: 'First of all, she was a congenital liar ("I am a liar. I've always been a liar") and

slightly psychopathic. And that kind of liar wears the face of truth, although they send out all sorts of signals that they are lying . . . One of the tip-offs is that they can't help breathing rather rapidly. So I hyperventilated before going into most of the scenes.'

The analysis and the solution are typical of Mary Astor. More importantly, they are typical of a good actress. An actress, that is, who conceives of her performance from the start in the terms the author has laid down, not in terms of her own personality. This is why every performance she gave has the ring of truthfulness

From top: *Beau Brummel* (1924), with her lover and teacher John Barrymore (left); *Don Juan* (1926), with John Barrymore; as Edith Cortright in *Dodsworth* (1936), with Walter Huston; *The Great Lie* (1941), with Bette Davis—'Hey, Astor, let's go talk a minute.'



and the depth of reality. She was never a good liar.

The extraordinary thing is that Mary Astor started, at the age of eleven, by sending her photograph to Brewster Publications, who promised Fame and Fortune to eight youngsters every month: one a year would receive the opportunity of a Film Test. Eleven-year-old Lucile Langhanke sent in her picture without her parents' knowledge—about the last thing she did without her father's domination and her mother's close attendance. She made the Eight, but she was not picked as the One. (Anyway, as her father said, the winner was probably Mr. Brewster's girlfriend.) And two years later she was in New York, closely guarded by father and mother, now a photographic model and a bit player.

Several things happened. First of all, the photographer Charles Albin took a series of Madonna-like stills that won her a contract with Harry Durant, of the Famous Players-Lasky Corporation. Then Jesse Lasky, Louella Parsons and Walter Wanger decreed that the name of Lucile Langhanke should be replaced by the more manageable Mary Astor. And then there was an encounter with Lillian Gish, who arranged a test for her by D.W. Griffith at his Mamaroneck Studios. Griffith failed her, as he had, about this time, nixed Norma Shearer: this time, though, as she learned later, it was because D.W. had glimpsed her father and noted his rapacity. 'The man's a walking cash-register. I could never mould this child into an actress with him on my neck all the time.' But this did not, unhappily, prevent Otto from clinging round Mary's neck for a long, long time.

Then came a stroke of luck. After a spate of quite ordinary roles, carrying her from support to leads, Mary found herself starring as Lady Margery Alvanley opposite John Barrymore in *Beau Brummel*. This brought her two things, both important: a lover and a teacher. With characteristic reserve, Miss Astor says little about John Barrymore as a lover, except to wonder what her mother and father actually thought she was *doing* during those long afternoon sessions when she and John were supposed to be working on their art. (I am quoting from Miss Astor's *A Life on Film*, which must surely be the most suggestive and the most intelligent autobiography ever written by a film actress.) John Barrymore opened doors for her. For him, acting was never 'self-expression'; it was the duty of the actor to be 'the expresser' of the writer. From this simple truth, quite apart from her native ability, came Mary Astor's later greatness as a screen actress.

One is tempted to wonder what would have happened to Mary Astor if she had never met John Barrymore. Surely she

would have been successful, and surely her intuitive taste and talent would have led her to discover these truths that made her acting so exceptional. As it was, the challenge came too soon. Jack Barrymore wanted her to be great; but Mary knew, or thought she knew, that to be great demanded more bravery than she possessed. 'I was not to learn the simple ingredients of courage for some time.' So she gave in to Dolores Costello. She was not anyway allowed to play Ophelia in Barrymore's London company of *Hamlet*; nor could she be his Lady Anne in *Richard III*. There was no money in it. Otto remained her mentor.

Perhaps all this explains how Mary Astor was a fine actress—who played lots and lots of parts in lots and lots of indifferent films. Her screen personality was very different from her personality in life: cool, she seemed, always a touch superior, witty, wise and distinguished. In fact she was uncertain, longing for the certainties of family, deprived always by the cupidity of father and mother of the warmth and security she longed for.

It was this, surely, which accounted for the extraordinary charm she gave to Edith Cortright, Walter Huston's lover in *Dodsworth*. Here is a woman who has truly loved and truly suffered. She has learned what life is about, what can be expected and what one has to put up with. 'She walked tall,' (the words are hers). 'She made no unnecessary gestures or movements. She was *cool*.' Could there be any advice more sensible, yet more understanding and more warm, than Mary Astor manages to put into the three words with which she warns the scatterbrained Ruth Chatterton when she is about to make a fool of herself with Paul Lukas—'My dear, *don't*'? There is magic here, of course, not to be analysed.

It was at the time of *Dodsworth* that Mary Astor became famous as the author of a Diary (largely, she says, apocryphal), in which she is supposed to have recounted, with the frankness we would expect, her love life. And particularly her passionate affair with the author, George Kauffman. What is really interesting about this—more interesting even than the vain supervisory meeting at the Goldwyn Studios of Goldwyn, Harry Cohn, Jack Warner, Irving Thalberg, Louis B. Mayer and Jesse Lasky—was Mary Astor's survival through the trial really by playing the part of Edith Cortright. 'She was three-dimensional in my mind, and I knew all about her.' Even more revealing is the comment: 'She had complete confidence in herself, and I had very little.' This terrific effort of compensation is one of the keys to Mary Astor's great distinction.

Try as she might, she could never play a completely commonplace woman.

If you saw, out of curiosity, *Page Miss Glory*, a Marion Davies vehicle directed for Warners by Mervyn LeRoy, you will have seen Mary Astor as Frank McHugh's wife. Well, she couldn't play that. Or at least, if she did, you kept wanting the film to cut back to her, and show what she was thinking. *The Maltese Falcon* was quite different—and one can only thank God for the good fortune that caused the leading roles to be turned down by George Raft and Geraldine Fitzgerald.

Yet even here—and I must admit that the thought only occurred to me after seeing the film three or four times—it is difficult to be sure that Sam Spade and Brigid O'Shaughnessy have actually slept together. Perhaps this is due to the relationship between Huston and Mary Astor (which she herself never mentioned); perhaps to the innate puritanism of both Astor and Bogart. The film, you may say, doesn't need it; and as it was made, it doesn't. Yet a certain unbridled sensuality should be there. It isn't; and that is another fact about Mary Astor.

Before *The Falcon* came *The Great Lie*, for which, amazingly, she had to test. This was a slice of hokum if ever there was one. 'Hey, Astor,' called Bette Davis. 'Let's go talk a minute.' The result of their talk was a uniquely pointed and amusing relationship—and, to emphasise another fine point about Mary Astor's acting, an extraordinarily intelligent succession of scenes. She played Tchaikowsky marvellously, like a steam engine; but the interesting part—in her words, 'the fun part'—was the contrast between the two women, the goody-goody (Davis for a change) and the hard-working, egotistical professional artist. Their scenes have a wit and an edge unique in movies. You see how Mary's comedy, always strong, had to come out of character, out of a truthfulness to situation, which makes Brigid O'Shaughnessy's sudden attack on Joel Cairo funny as well as shocking.

It is astonishing indeed to hear that Preston Sturges was dissatisfied with her lovely, dizzy millionairess in *The Palm Beach Story*. Sturges must have had, fixed firmly in his mind, the actual style of those crazy ladies who used to accompany his mother, Mary D'Este, with Isadora Duncan round the South of France. Mary had to be true to herself, and to give his dialogue an accent quite different—but just as funny. There is a lesson here for all directors.

After her long spell of freelancing, Mary Astor settled for an MGM contract and (much too young) a string of 'Mom' parts. Most of these, quite properly, she despised. But it is impossible to think of the best of them, *Meet Me in St Louis*, without remembering Mary Astor, endlessly capable, deeply feeling, as mistress of the family. On Christmas Eve,

Father announces that there will be no move to New York: there is laughter and relief and an opening of presents: Mother turns away from her family, giving way at last to her tears of thankfulness and love. It is a moment of private joy, expressed at last by one who has believed in keeping her feelings to herself, exquisitely played. Only a wonderful actress, as sure of her technique as of her emotion, could have brought it off.

Films need stars, or at least audiences do. But stars cannot always act; and some actresses reject stardom. Mary Astor lacked the vulgarity, the elephantiasis of the ego, that almost always goes with stardom; and she refused the responsibility that goes with it too. She was never ambitious—perhaps to a fault. When she got tired with playing Marmee in LeRoy's indifferent, over-upholstered remake of *Little Women*, she went across to a neighbouring stage, put on a two-bit dress bought at a cheap department store, and played—brilliantly—a sleazy, getting-on whore in *Act of Violence*. She loved to act.

Mary Astor was always more of a pro. than an *aficionado*. She left Hollywood to concentrate on TV, on the stage, and finally writing. She came back to films for *Hush*, *Hush Sweet Charlotte*, an inflated horrorer with Bette Davis and Olivia de Havilland. As Bette said to her director, Robert Aldrich: 'Turn her loose, Robert, you might learn something.' She only had two short scenes as the aging murderess, waiting over her teacups to die; but they are scenes worth waiting for when the old clinker comes up on television. When all the tributes to truthfulness have been paid, I still don't know quite what it is that makes the woman so instantly *real*. It must be what she herself said: the character is three-dimensional, and Miss Astor knows all about her.

One should not ask for more, but one does. What a pity, one cannot help reflecting, her matchless ability, in comedy and in tragedy but best of all in both, seems never to have tackled the sharp, compassionate observation of Chekhov. I think particularly of *The Cherry Orchard*, which Garbo turned down. The mythic Swede would have been marvellous, but top-heavy. Bette Davis would have done splendid things with Ranevskaya. But best, most spell-binding of all, would have been Mary Astor. She would have given the character its enchanting fickleness, its absurdity; but also its heart-wrenching poetry, its sense of the passing of time. She acted (as she would have been the first to admit) in some dogs; but she left us a collection of performances of complete authority, sad as well as funny. I wish I had been privileged to direct her. I should have learned a lot. ■

From top: *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), lacking 'a certain unbridled sensuality'; *The Palm Beach Story* (1942), the dizzy millionairess with Joel McCrea; *Little Women* (1948), with June Allyson; back to back with *Act of Violence* (1948), as the 'sleazy, getting-on whore', with Van Heflin.



Nicholas Ray

ON DIRECTING



Most directors do not know how to communicate with actors. Instead they rely on the externals of composition, camera angles, lighting, lens. It's much easier for a director to relate to the mechanics of the camera, just as it's much easier for an actor to relate to an image of his part and himself in that part, than to relate in terms of action. In both cases a full-blown image is superimposed on the content, and the groundwork is neglected.

To ad lib a discussion on acting and directing actors is perhaps a lot less complicated than the people who write about acting and don't do it, or who write about directing and don't do it, make it out to be. It's not that writers aren't perfectly capable of discussing and clarifying the crafts of acting and directing, perhaps much better than those who do them, but it isn't their way of making a living, and books require so many words.

I used to try to read books on acting. Even as a student, I found it terribly difficult to read books. I still find it difficult to read books and learn anything. A book may make an impression, and the impression may evolve into an action, but I've never been able to follow a formula.

On the other hand, although I may say everything I have to say about some subjects in just a few lines, when I begin to probe and do a little surgery to find out how actors arrive at that state beyond their own personalities, that state of being able to convince people they are who they are and yet not who they are within a situation, a more thorough discussion is required of many techniques and theories which derive from probably as many schools of stage-and filmcraft as there are schools of psychoanalysis or finance.

So today, for the first time in 25 years, I read the final chapters of *An Actor Prepares*. I was going to say 40 years, and then I looked at the publication date of the book: 1949. This is 1977. Certainly, then, it can only be 28 years. Yet I have been working according to the principles in this book for 40 years. How has that happened? Well, not by accident.

It was severe economic depression time. The cover of an issue of a prominent arts magazine was white bordered in black, and read, 'The Theatre Is Dead. Let's Give It a Decent Burial.' And I, green from the Midwest, untrained and inexperienced (one could be untrained and experienced), was offered a job in a Broadway production called

[*Her Man of Wax?*]. There was a hook in it, a sexual one. I rejected it and walked to a theatre housed in a loft at 42 East 12th Street that I had heard called 'real', 'sincere'. I wanted to be real. I wanted to be sincere.

My audition for The Theatre was successful. I moved from a room in a building called Desire Under the L into a five-room apartment on East 13th Street which twelve other members of The Theatre shared with me. My eating habits changed from boiled, fried or baked cornmeal three times a day to tea and dark bread for breakfast, a cream-cheese sandwich for lunch, and whatever remained of what a seventeen-cent-a-week food budget could provide for dinner. And I began to enjoy a full life.

Contributing to that fullness were my roommates and fellow actors, volunteers from Martha Graham's company (Doris Dudley and Anna Sokolov were my favourites) to teach body movement, voice and diction teachers, Elsa Findlay in eurythmics, and Billy Lewis, Lewis Leverett, Morris Carnovsky, and of particular significance for me, Elia Kazan from the Group Theater.

Let me start with Kazan. I consider Gadge Kazan the best actors' director the theatre training available in the

INTRODUCTION BY SUSAN RAY

In 1975, at the San Sebastian Film Festival after a screening of *The Parallax View*, I recall Alan Pakula shook Nick's hand and, with a bow of the head, uttered the word 'Maitre'. It was a courtly gesture which left Nick both touched and flustered. As witness to such a rich moment I posed to myself the questions: What is a master, and what makes Nick one?

Mastery, to my early mind, meant a kind of perfection, and control over craft and circumstance. It was a quality in a person or product, it seemed to me, that one could not miss or mistake for any other, that would show itself in an orderliness or harmony, and a powerful calm. I found Nick's films unmistakable, but surely not for their order or calm.

As for Nick himself, he was at that time despairing in alcoholic disease and waging battle to support the completion of *We Can't Go Home Again*, not to mention his basic survival. Both his life and work were out of control. I wondered if Mr Pakula had been too kind, or perhaps he had made an error in judgment? None the less, I held the questions in my mind, and have continued to do so over years, particularly while working with Nick's notes and tapes for the book from which the following excerpt is drawn.

In 1976 Nick began pre-production on a project called *Murphy's Law* about a New York City hooker and a storefront lawyer, both down on their luck and lonesome. In the course of things the blonde who was to play the lead confided to Nick that she only looked good in blue. Nick nursed this information until, over lunch with the costume designer, he looked up from his soup and announced, 'We'll shoot the whole thing in blue, and call it *City Blues*.'

Nick never shot the film, and I can't say what it might or might not have been, blue or otherwise; but I was struck by the way he opened himself to the given conditions—from the moan of the City that summer to the ache in the story's hero to his star's demands for her wardrobe—and let them settle into their own unity. I saw that Nick's vision had to be wide to embrace such disparate elements, and precise to find the essential connections between them; but more than that, and

despite his imagination and skill at telling tales, I saw his deep respect for earthy, raw, foolish life as it is. It was not respect for its own sake but respect as the most natural stance towards the inspiration he knew to look for and recognise in almost every person and situation.

But receptiveness and awareness alone would not be enough to fill out the definition of master; mastery demands active, transcendent skill.

Since Nick's death a great many stories have been told and retold me about him. One man reminded me of the time when, as a student at the University of Michigan, he picked up Nick and me in his speedy new car to drive us to school so Nick could meet a speaking engagement. Before we could blink, Nick in his eyepatch was at the wheel and flying us down the interstate highway. A few breaths later he was easing the suddenly lopsided car on to the shoulder, and through the rear window we still could see the back left tyre careering down the road. 'We could have been killed!' the man marvelled.

In fact everyone who told me stories of their encounters with Nick, whether with affection, adoration, resentment or scorn, conveyed a common experience: that with Nick they'd been stretched to the limits of expectation and beyond; they'd been to the edge and peered over. Nick could see the essential nature of a situation, an actor, a moment in time, and knew how to set the fire to explode it.

Maybe that was his mastery. If not a transcendent skill, it was at least a skill for some kind of transcendence by which the most acutely personal ingredients, when exposed to his lens and light, broke through time and place. The fire, however, was not just a pyrotechnical tool, but burned from the offering made over and over and over again of a life to an art, with love.

The following piece will appear in a book edited from Nick's personal and teaching notes which will be published in French by Editions Yellow Now.

United States has ever produced. His achievements as a director are immense. It's puzzling to me that his intelligence and instinct should be so erratically represented by his works.

I met Gadge in work at the loft, and I met him socially, through his wife Molly who was teaching playwriting. I acted in the first play Kazan directed. Earning a living as an actor embarrassed me terribly. I did it for two-and-a-half years, and only because I wanted to become a director. Kazan had already established a very solid reputation in the theatre as an actor with one or two performances which were considered among the ten best of the year, but he did not want to be an actor either. Kazan and I became friends because we both wanted to be directors, and knew that in order to do so we had to learn the problems of the actor.

In mid-adolescence I had my sights set on becoming a director of symphony orchestras. It was painful to admit that I had neither facility nor talent with piano, reeds, strings or brass. How are you going to learn the problems of the actor unless you act? You can theorise a great deal, and it will keep you comfortable and prevent you from doing anything. It isn't necessary to be comfortable, but overtalking is a

danger. A director who hasn't had experience as an actor is a cripple.

Kazan went out to Hollywood for *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, his first directorial job in film, and took me with him as his assistant. During the casting some incredible tests were shot. We decided on Peggy Ann Garner as the girl. She was twelve, had no stage experience and could not be terribly loaded down with any theories on acting; but she did have a mother who was a lush and bad-checkue passer. Dorothy McGuire played her mother. Dorothy was well educated, from an elegant background and married into a family of northeastern bluebloods. Until then she had been a stage actress. And James Dunn, who played the father, was a drunk who had drunk himself out of the business and had all of the realistic qualities of the character of Johnnie in the story. He could have been a burlesque comic, associated mostly with gamblers, musicians and burlesque people, and was a constant risk in everybody's mind, as well as a pretty beautiful human being who gave us an Academy Award winning performance. Kazan's extraordinary technique brought those three very different people with different backgrounds and experiences together in a unit. He got

them all into the same key, and there was not one note jarring.

What I had to learn then, Kazan taught me; what he didn't teach me he guided and encouraged me to learn for myself. But he was the source, the well from which I drank most deeply. He brought the essence of the last few chapters of *An Actor Prepares* to me long before they were in print. That we may each have interpreted them differently in later years is of no matter.

So now at 65 I am once again making the transition from cornmeal mush three times a day to a more varied diet. I am twice blessed. And so is the actor who wants to work in front of a camera and reads Stanislavski's book. An individual, whether actor, director, producer, critic, who says acting in front of the camera is easier than acting on stage may not be an idiot. He just runs from the truth, and that's pretty idiotic.

I assume we want in this discussion to distinguish between film acting and stage acting and psychiatric acting out, as well as voluntary and involuntary acting. For the sake of unity, I will speak from the director's point-of-view.

I made a note during that time working with Kazan: 'Don't direct a natural.'

If you're lucky enough to find a natural, let him run, because in him you have a free gift. But most are not naturals and need direction, whether old or young, amateur or professional.

Another note I made to myself, as I recall, related to working with the actor direct from the theatre who has not had the experience of the camera, but has had the experience of projecting what he is doing out to row Z of the balcony. If the actor has a method of work at all, the director must encourage him in his method of work to arrive at the same truth and pitch of emotion that he would need to project in the theatre, and then he must sit on it, because the camera is a microscope and an enlarger.

A lot of people who seek careers as actors never bother to have a method of work. Others who have a method of work do not realise they have one. And still others have to have their bad habits broken without completely deflating their confidence. It's often more fun to work with an absolute amateur.

The approach to getting a performance from an actor and a non-actor, or from a film actor and a stage actor, is sometimes identical, and sometimes absolutely opposite, and conceived on the spot, without any regard for following a plan. I've cast non-actors, people who had never before been on stage or screen, in every film I've made. My personal preference in casting a part is to walk around the block with an actor, find out who he is, where he's from, what he really wants as a person, what his interests are, rather than have him do an improvisation to a scene or read from a script. An actor may make a very good impression, but unless he can project an understanding which has some emotional basis to it, both the director and the actor are going to be in trouble.

Whether or not an actor is a natural for the part I've asked him or her to play seems immaterial, except for



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one thing: you can overdirect a very good actor without serious consequence, but if you overdirect a natural, he won't come back the next day; he'll be confused. So the language has to be different, your language and behaviour with the non-actor must be disarming.

If you are fortunate, you will have a week or so to get acquainted with him. You must in that week—but if it's only a matter of three hours, you must in those three hours—find a connection to that person so you can help him respond unselfconsciously in front of the camera. The only ways to achieve that unself-consciousness, in my opinion, are concentration and surprise.

In order to achieve concentration with a non-actor you must find within him his greatest want or need at that moment, and transfer it to the situation of the film. It's really no different with the actor, but with a non-actor you have to be able to get him to concentrate without ever using the word 'concentrate', you have to get him to relax without ever using the word 'relax'. If you hear a director use those words to his cast with any consistency at all, then suspect the director, because to tell an actor to relax or concentrate on the

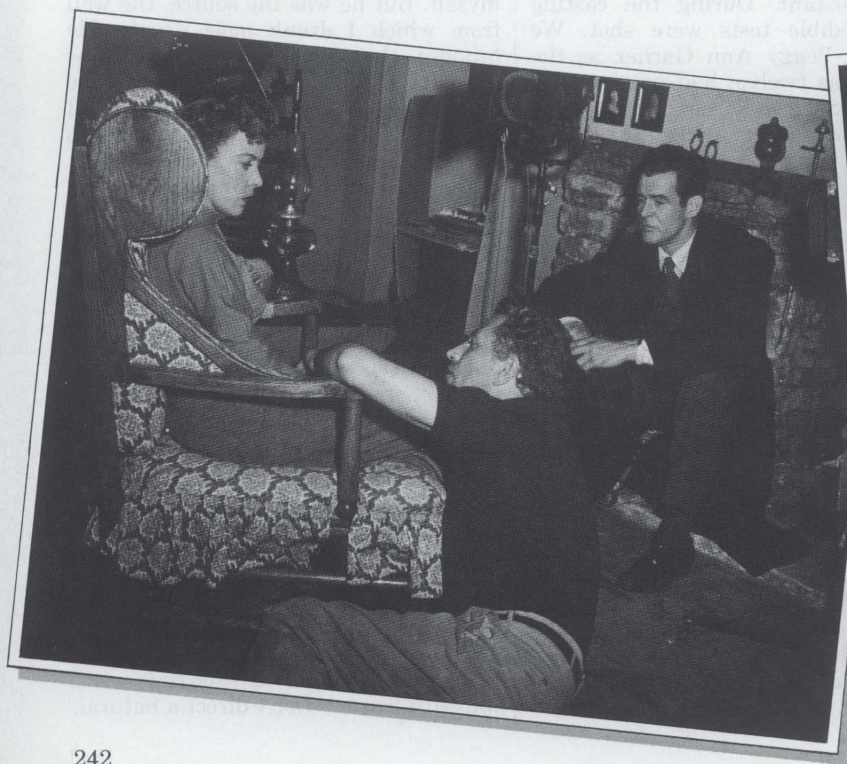
lines is not going to be of very much help.

On the other hand, if the director can set up a condition which demands concentration, then the actor will concentrate on his action as the character. A character cannot come alive until the actor makes the transition from, 'If I were he, what would I want? What would I do?' to 'I want this.' The director must help the actor find the thing he wants in his own terms—not by dictating it to him, or by saying, 'This is who you are and this is what you want.' You must help him find what he wants himself, keeping in mind what happened to him just before and the obstacles he must face. You may have to help him with some description to give him the right gait, the right look, the right aspect. Then what follows in his performance may surprise you, and that's always good.

Then there's the technique of surprise. In rehearsal you may sense that the scene is close to ready, and that the amateur, this unsophisticated piece of raw material you like, is enjoying himself, but will freeze the moment the assistant director calls 'Quiet!' or the cameraman goes up to kick a lamp into place. So you turn on the camera without letting anybody know, and shoot the rehearsal, and then shoot the formality as well, but print only the take that nobody knows about. At those times you have to keep the assistant, or the cameraman, or the technicians, quiet, because they have no sense of actors at all, and are likely to bust out with 'Print that!' after the rehearsal. Your crew has to be very tight around you; you have to tell them exactly what you're doing.

Other techniques of surprise are use of the hidden camera, or introducing a foreign element into the scene at the very last moment to turn it into an improvisation.

A fundamental for the director, which



has only very rare exceptions, is that every sentence, thought, phrase that is spoken on screen must sound as though it were being spoken for the very first or very last time. The only in-between times are those in quotes to make a particular dramatic point, as when one person satirises himself or another.

How do you achieve that first or last-time quality? You've persuaded a non-actor to play in the film with you. You believe the way he's going to speak the lines will be exactly what you want because in conversation with him that was true, and one of the things that attracted you to him. But a lot of things have happened since you first asked him to work with you: during the first blocking with camera he got his first face-to-face look at the camera and walked off the set worried. Then some well-meaning grip or make-up man or script clerk or another actor went up to him and told him he mustn't be nervous.

By the time you're ready for the first take with him you have a mess on your hands. You can then call casting and tell them you've made a terrible mistake and need a different actor in a hurry, would they get someone out of the company or central casting, you don't care, you just want anybody who can walk, who has been in front of the camera before. But that's a thing any director with a healthy ego will refuse to do. So you've got some work ahead of you.

Now you have to direct like hell. The non-actor will have accumulated in a period of five minutes to a half-hour as many blocks as has the professional actor in long years of developing external techniques and mannerisms—which also need breaking down. The process with the non-actor and the actor is the same, but again with a different language, because you can't talk to the non-professional in professional terms. This is why you have to spend some



**By the way,
I know of no
good — I mean really
good — male actor who
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being an actor.**

time with him beforehand—whether you go out whoring or drinking, or play cards or baseball—to find out what his life has been, which areas you connect with.

If you give importance to the casting at all, you must do those things that will facilitate his concentration on what he personally wants, and so enable him to be true to himself, the character that you want. More than confidence, he must find his pride, authority and a freedom from shame of any kind. The non-actor must have the excuse, if he makes a mistake, that he really wasn't himself. He's already embarrassed enough at being in front of the camera.

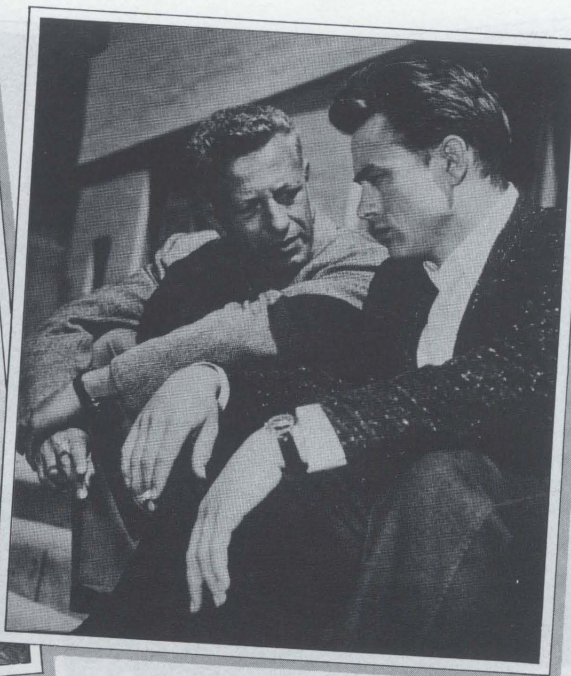
So when you're working with a cast of people, you have to find a vocabulary common to each person in it. You must become expert at being able to handle about eight or ten different vocabularies, but each must be filtered through your own, and then translated. Occasionally, with actors like Arthur Kennedy or James Dean, you will have a language so common you can speak in shorthand. You can give them just one or two key words, and before the lamps are cool between takes you will be back shooting again, because the understanding is that complete.

Let's say after three or four takes your man goes dry. You have to be able to find some way to refresh him. At this point I might give him an action contradictory to everything he has developed so far. This confuses him. He will think I'm an awful bastard and go back into the scene muttering to himself about the kind of director who would contradict himself in the space of forty minutes. But he's already had enough kinetic experience, he's made enough personal associations to the character, to keep the fundamental action alive. And the melody, which shows in the eyes, becomes more interesting, because he's trying to think something out. I'd given him a false concentration, which then becomes a true one, and he's fresh again.

You must do the same with a very long experienced actor, and you must do it, I'm afraid, in almost exactly the same way. And if that doesn't work, then you have to try something else. You have to be very patient. Bogart, for example, would go dry after six takes. The first time I went over six takes with him, I had to stop on the seventh and close up for the day; there was no point in trying for more. The next morning I began with an insert as a warm-up, and to get away from anything he might have had a block about from the night before.

By the way, I know of no good—I mean really good—male actor who is not embarrassed at being an actor. So within the two extremes of experience you have the same characteristic to deal with: the very new and the very good are both embarrassed.

I seem to be saying that you have the same problems with the over-experienced, aged-in-wood actor who is wooden as a result as you have with the inexperienced non-actor, that precious jewel, the natural. The great majority of actors



The director and the actors:
From left: *On Dangerous Ground* (1951), Nicholas Ray with Ida Lupino, Robert Ryan. *The Lusty Men* (1952), with Robert Mitchum. *In a Lonely Place* (1950), with Humphrey Bogart, Gloria Grahame. *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), with James Dean.

are those in between. They range from the egoistic exhibitionist to the competent craftsman/journeyman.

The latter may have a technique and theory and knowledge, a real, hip familiarity with everything that's happening on the set and in the part, a mixed bag of tricks which he uses discreetly. He may always think he's good because he has craft, he has facility; he knows how to use his equipment. He usually also has a bank account, a first mortgage on his home, a membership in the Rotarians; but he's never had an inspiration in his life. He's had a lot of things he thought were inspiration because he wanted to think of himself as being an inspired fellow. He's of the majority, and all you can do is employ him as being the best utility available and, if you're any good as a director, make him seem better than he is.

In nearly every film I've worked on, tried to develop into a whole piece of entertainment, I've had actors from every single background, every kind of school that there is. There is no generality that works for all of them. A director must prepare himself to deal with all kinds of training by learning the terms with which your actors are used to working. In *Rebel Without a Cause* the parents surrounding Dean were actors who would have been horrified to know they were doing improvisation. Instead we kept it on the simple level of ad lib. That way it met their own enjoyment requirements, so there was spontaneity, there was improvisation; we just didn't use the words. The words would have frightened them.

The Group Theater had a famous phrase of advice for actors just before entrance: 'Take a minute.' The old vaudeville actors took the same minute before going on, but they called it 'freezing'. And if anybody came up to them during that moment and asked, 'How'd the Yanks do today?' they'd grab the



In *Rebel Without a Cause* the parents surrounding Dean were actors who would have been horrified to know they were doing improvisation.

nearest stage brace and crack the guy over the head for disturbing their concentration.

You may have to work with people who are very professional, but their profession is dancing or singing. Singers are difficult to work with, because they never make connection with the eyes of the other actors. They look at the foreheads. They're trained to do that. They're usually stiff messes, ossified gelatin. Contemporary singers of either acid rock or beat or pop may be exceptions to that, but they'll bring with them another complication, one of false modesty, or false disdain, or of absolutely insufferable ego covered over by a shell of its opposite. There the task of the director is to work to reduce the shame of being anxious. It's difficult, because you're no better than an analyst, and you're not going to change anybody's character. The character is there, but the affectation can be changed; controls can be instituted.

But you don't have time to give acting lessons to everybody. There are certain self-indulgent actors who feel they are doing a favour to the audience by appearing, and then proceed to exercise their own usually psychotic needs. These fellows mistake creative activity

for confusion, or confusion for creative activity, in my opinion. And they have every question to ask, just like a child who doesn't want to drink his milk, because who knows which cow the milk came from.

From the moment you see an actor come on to the set, you must sense enough of what has happened to him just before to know if there is something there to be used for the scene. You must know the material better than the actors. You must know what you believe the actions of each actor to be, and also have options in mind, so if the actor has chosen a wrong action, there is another choice ready for him and he's not left floundering. Actors by themselves can take a scene and rehearse it only so far.

There are those actors who will ask the director to demonstrate what he wants, and then they'll take over immediately, and then maybe you'll be able to breathe a little more into it. You may do this only once or twice during a film or in rehearsals, but just enough to give the actor confidence, to get him started. It's like getting the writer to put the first letters down on a piece of paper.

This method, which is perhaps the most difficult and time-consuming and demanding method I know of anybody using, requires a relationship between actor and director such that everything said between you, either in the preliminary contact or between takes, is of a terribly intimate nature in its content and associations. It is my recommendation that the director of a film always keep the exchange between himself and an actor away from the ears of other actors. You must not violate an actor's confidential, personal information, because if you do he's going to shut off the flow between him and you and the other actors as well.

At the same time, a director must expose himself, if only by lying. I'll tell



the most atrocious stories imaginable about myself to get an actor to release himself without feeling ashamed, so he can say, 'But he did five, ten times as bad as I did, and he's the director. If he's that bad, I can be that bad too.' But this assumes you have been able to convince the actor with whom you are working that his basic equipment—in addition to the script, the sets, the props, the director—is himself: his memories, associations, imagination. Of all those things, the most important is the imagination.

No director I've ever known has been able to breathe talent into an actor. Don't try it. You can't breathe in the talent, but you can breathe in imagination. And that you have to have in abundance, because no director is talented enough, in my opinion, except a Welles or a Chaplin, to play all the parts. You need your cast, but you have to know how to make them a little bit better than they are.

Then, after all the multitudinous details of lights, props, colour, set-dressing, wardrobe, hair, make-up, crew temperament, focus, rehearsal and the terribly intimate exchanges with actors have been attended to, the director has to go back to the camera, and he has to exercise and develop for himself a relaxation, a willingness to accept, and a willingness not to take anything for granted. Before you permit the camera to be turned, you must be ready to receive and respond to and evaluate the scene about to play; and if in the course of the scene you find a lack in your response, you have to find out why, and either redirect the actors or supply them with something else to work from until the scene is fulfilled. And again, this all goes back to knowing what you want from the scene, knowing your action.

The director must never rule out



If you want to be a director with the thought that therefore you will be loved, forget it, you're in the wrong business.

intuition. On the contrary, you must learn to have faith in it. We all get certain signals from time to time, and if we trust them once or twice, we begin to recognise when they happen. Most of us go through life without realising the reality of extra-sensory perception. There's always a chance of becoming more and more in tune, more and more receptive.

In this sense, the director has to be an actor. Just as the actor has only himself to work with, so the director has only himself, his own responses to determine when he's not satisfied, when to go for another take, when to print. You have to train your instrument, and keep it in tune day by day, just like the actor.

And like the actor, the director has to remain in control. Remaining in control does not mean scaring the cast, crew or staff working with you. Authority generally is most effectively maintained by your ability to stimulate the imaginations and mutual interests of the people involved, all of which come together through you. In this way you are, at the worst, a benevolent dictator.

The director in film has to know everything there is to know about stage equipment, plus everything there is to know about stage communication, plus

as much about theatre, acting, musical composition, vocal training, current events, politics, involvement and anything and everything else as you can absorb. There must be nothing a film director can't or shouldn't do. Abbie Hoffman put it well when he lectured at the Art Institute of Chicago one night during the Chicago Conspiracy trial. He said, 'What is art? Fuck art! Art is what you're doing! What is politics? Fuck politics! Politics is living!'

I understand there are young people making three-minute, five-minute films to fulfil course requirements in school. In this way the young film-maker becomes a person withdrawn from his society. He does everything alone. Finally, I don't think you can make a film alone. You need the lab, you need the guy who sells the film, you need the guy who makes the camera. You need your wife and your friends to provide transportation, to do things for you. You just can't make a film alone. To me the *raison d'être*, the obligation, of the director is to provide to the audience a heightened experience, a heightened sense of being. If a director can't say hello to other people, how is he going to say hello to an audience?

A director must be unselfish. It's a complicated, wonderful profession, but thankless. Drop it before it's too late, and you'll find life easier, quieter and more respectable. Otherwise love the stage. Love it more than you love your home. A director feels the joy of creating only when this joy is shared by all those who surround him.

If I were asked, 'So what's the magic formula for becoming a director?' I'd say, 'Don't be afraid to be a sonofabitch.' If you want to be a director with the thought that therefore you will be loved, forget it, you're in the wrong business. ■

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From left: *The Savage Innocents* (1959), Ray with Anthony Quinn, Yoko Tani. *King of Kings* (1961), with Frank Thring, Rita Gam. *55 Days at Peking* (1962), with Robert Helpmann. *We Can't Go Home Again* (1971), with Dennis Hopper.

OFF TO SEE THE WIZARD

It's told around Hollywood that a UCLA film student once strolled out on to Sunset Boulevard and asked every person she met, 'How's your screenplay going?' She was up to about twenty before she came across somebody who said 'What screenplay?' I'd assumed, when I attended one of Robert McKee's 'Story Structure' courses, that I'd be able to pull much the same trick on my fellow participants. Rather to my surprise, it was some time before I found anyone who'd admit they were writing a screenplay, or indeed anything at all. Writers, it seems, make up a relatively small proportion of McKee's audience.

McKee's is perhaps the most famous of the numerous screenwriting courses which have sprung up in the last few years as people have realised, or rather recollected, that you can't have a good film without a good script. Though his course has an academic basis—it started out as a PhD thesis—it takes a thoroughly practical stance, drawing on his experience as a Hollywood screenwriter and script analyst. It's an approach which has proved internationally acceptable among industry professionals, including the Hollywood establishment.

This may explain why McKee attracts producers, script editors, actors, corporate film-makers, copywriters, directors, agents, and even moneymen, quite as much as bonafide writers—all hoping to crack the mystery of the sure-fire script. Indeed, there's something of the mystagogue about McKee as he reveals the rites and arcana of the screenwriter's craft. It's perhaps this hint of revelation, of being granted access to esoteric lore, that accounts for the enthusiasm—as well as the sometimes virulent antipathy—that he seems to arouse.

I'd already heard a good deal about the course beforehand. My agent had attended one of the earliest held in England, some three years ago, and was greatly impressed. Several fellow writers had also attended and, despite cynical protestations, caveats, and the usual qualifying subordinate clauses without which no self-respecting writer can down a pint, they all seemed to have succumbed to McKee's spell.

When he makes his entrance you can see why. With his thick dark flyaway eyebrows there's a hint of Gandalf about Robert McKee, at once avuncular and faintly dangerous, as he simultaneously conjures up the magic of the movies and exposes how the trick is done. And, as with most conjurers, the style is pure showmanship—not surprising, since he used to be an actor. His courses are scripted down to the last spontaneous joke, carefully structured and timed to perfection. Which, he would argue, is exactly what a good script must be.

For all the first-class production values, the course makes for a gruelling three days—and not only because of the discomfort of perching on slender gilt and velvet chairs in the slightly tacky grandeur of the National Liberal Club. Each day starts promptly at 9 a.m. and finishes around 7 p.m., with a strictly observed hour for lunch and three short coffee breaks. Without ceremony, McKee launches into his vision of what storytelling is and what the course is about. What he's teaching, he claims, isn't formula but form, a set of principles rather than rigid dogma. 'There's a form to storytelling,' he repeatedly asserts, 'exactly as there's a form to music.' Few writers, I suspect, would disagree.

Definitions are swiftly laid down, and from there the course expands outwards, taking in wider swathes of material as it goes. Structure, in today's jargon, is what used to be called plot: the sequence of meaningful events which reveal character and thus communicate the central or 'controlling' idea of the story. To make things simple, the course concentrates on the straightforward three-act, single-protagonist, 'classical' structure—the form taken by the vast majority of films. Alternative forms, such as minimalism and anti-structure, are glanced on pertinently but no more than briefly.

The form may be simple, but it's certainly rich, and note-taker's elbow soon sets in. Tape-recorders are banned, as McKee is supposed to be producing a book for Warner Brothers, yet I see few around me jotting things down. Perhaps



it's only writers who have poor memories.

McKee meanwhile is systematically outlining the relationship of structure to the key elements in a film such as setting, genre, ideas and counter-ideas, audience and so on. But it's when he gets to the relationship of character to structure that vistas really start to open out. Suddenly, for me anyway, precepts with which I was already familiar start to take on concrete form.

This is partly because McKee chooses his examples so astutely. Using films which he can expect the majority of his audience to have seen—*Kramer vs Kramer*, *Ordinary People*, *Star Wars*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*—he vividly illustrates each point. No movie clips—it's all done verbally. McKee summons up a scene succinctly, bringing it alive to your mind's eye (even if you haven't seen the film). By doing so, he not only conveys the point he's making, but also demonstrates how a screenwriter must 'put a movie into a reader's head, so they see the movie as they turn the pages'.

Having laid the groundwork, McKee turns to the mechanics of a screenplay's structure: how one gets from point to point—and why one needs to. He introduces what he calls the inciting incident (the event that starts the story), and goes on to detail such concepts as set-ups and pay-offs, turning points, act climaxes and subplots, culminating in the film's final crisis and resolution.

Endings are given particular emphasis—they are, after all, what the audience remembers. A good one, McKee contends, should send their minds back through the whole film, providing new insights into its meaning. In fact, 'if the character of your protagonist doesn't fit the ending, and it's a good ending, you should change the character.'

Altogether one of the most illuminating aspects of the course is McKee's attitude to character. For him character is structure. Instead of separating the two elements, he argues that it's the choices made under pressure—especially by the protagonist—and the subsequent conflicts experienced which drive the film along. Therefore the forces of antagonism, the obstacles which have to be overcome, need to be appropriately strong—since they're the prime means of pushing the protagonist to the limit and thus compelling her or him to grow, change and consequently provide the audience with a satisfying emotional climax.

McKee is at his most incisive discussing the emotional pay-offs and the values underpinning a film. He insists on the power of storytelling to affect people's lives, and maintains that by its nature film (whether on the large or small screen) is the most powerful way of telling a story yet invented. Writers, he vehemently insists, must therefore

be aware not only that a film—whatever its genre—is about ideas and must have integrity, but also that they have a social responsibility towards their audience.

Writers attending a McKee course alternately have their egos stroked—who could resist being told that their work is all-important, everyone else's task being merely to 'interpret the script'?—and are slapped down for laziness or cheating the audience. McKee never pretends that screenwriting is a soft option—morally or physically. He has no time for hacks.

On the practical side, since the course is by no means exclusively theoretical, McKee offers plenty of sound advice. He gives a smart rundown on the way many successful scriptwriters organise their writing to make the most economical use of their time—and talent. He also tackles, succinctly, areas which give many writers (and not only novices) difficulties: such as exposition, dialogue, and just how much description one should include.

In this latter area, McKee is adamant that 'screenplays have no literary integrity'. He dismisses the use of camera directions (including the 'we see' and 'we hear' favoured by some script teachers). But he does believe that scripts have their own inherent poetry. Scenes can be conveyed vividly—and in few words—by using language precisely, and a writer can influence the look of a film. Indeed, it's part of the writer's job to set up image systems for the director and other team members to elaborate.

Just how subtle and powerful such systems can be McKee reveals in a tour de force description (one of several over the weekend) of Clouzot's dark psychological thriller *Les Diaboliques*. Images of liquid and water permeate every scene—building from an innocuous mud puddle in the opening shot to the terrifying symbolism of the dripping tap in the closing moments.

But not until the end of the course, and the fascinating 'autopsy' of *Casablanca*, do I begin to register the full wealth of the material McKee has been expounding. The relationship of beats, scenes, sequences and acts to the story as a whole becomes clear as we're guided through the film. (This one, of course, he does screen, and in full.) Subtext, that essential element of fiction—the substance that actors act—comes into focus as Claude Rains and Conrad Veidt duck and weave, manoeuvring for power, as they greet each other at Casablanca airport. Image systems reveal their potential, and subplots show their strengths, when the film is dissected moment by moment.

Still, being shown the sleight of hand is not quite the same as doing it yourself. If there's a flaw in McKee's approach it lies, I suspect, in the dynamic but closed delivery. We sit at the

feet of the sage, imbibing his wisdom—there's no participation as such. Neither is there any sense of the teacher exploring the issues, or being open to any insights from us, let alone to new thoughts of his own. McKee succeeds in reducing all these powerful, professional adults to the rivalry and humiliations of the classroom. He accepts few questions, and when he asks them himself rarely seems gratified by the answers.

It could be argued that there's nothing so original about what McKee propounds. Much of it is basic Aristotle, and similar insights are offered by other teachers in the field, Frank Daniels, Edward Dmytryk, Alexander Mackendrick, Linda Seger, and the authors of standard textbooks such as Syd Field (for whom McKee seems to harbour particular antipathy).

Yet McKee inspires. The consensus, among writers anyway, is that what he says is sound, the way he says it mostly works, and if you can't take opinionated people then you're in the wrong business. And what the heck, no one else has offered such a good bag of tools at such a reasonable price for a long while.

Oddly enough, most objections to the course come not from writers, who see the value of turning the 'art' of writing into conscious craft, but from certain producers, script editors and other decision-makers, who apparently fear that once writers, especially neophytes, are exposed to McKee their natural talent and imagination will somehow dissipate, and said producers, etc, will be inundated with dull, formula, McKee-cloned scripts. It seems a strange reaction—especially since the present untutored hordes allegedly produce nothing but dull, formula scripts without having gone near McKee.

In any case, why should writers alone be possessed of this fragile mystique? Painters attend art school, composers study harmony and counterpoint, architects learn the basic principles of engineering, and no one suggests that their delicate natural talents won't survive such training. Personally, I'm inclined to agree with Michael Eaton (writer of *Fellow Traveller*) that any dire consequences of McKee's work lie elsewhere.

I think courses like that are much more dangerous for producers to attend than they are for writers. Already we're seeing a situation that when you go for a script meeting with a script editor or a producer, the person throws back at you, "Well, what's the controlling idea? Where's the spine?" Esoteric lore in the wrong hands can be a problem. Did someone mention the Sorcerer's Apprentice? ■

Robert McKee's courses are run by International Forum, whose representative in Britain is Joan Harrison, telephone 0732 810925.

Kockenlocker (Penelope Houston) on an Antonioni book, an Oxford film location and Japanese arts prizes

ANTONIONI

An Antonioni season at the National Film Theatre; a new book on the master (*Antonioni*, by Sam Rhodie, BFI, £30 and £10.95) . . . It sounds like old times. The interesting thing is going to be the reaction, critical and otherwise. Has the moment been rightly judged for an Antonioni revival?

It's a bit startling to realise just how far he has to come back. A sample poll—by which I mean casual questioning of half a dozen or more people in their twenties, all fairly enthusiastic filmgoers—finds only two who admit any acquaintance with an Antonioni film (and that one, predictably, *Blow Up*) and some shakiness about identifying other titles.

It is not that Antonioni has ditched himself by going off the rails or by making flaccid, old man's films, like some other directors from the 1960s. Simply, his best work has slipped off the current cinema map. And, of course, the present crop of enthusiastic filmgoers will probably have seen far fewer subtitled films than their predecessors. Ironically, the closer we get to Europe, the less chance there seems to be for European classics on British screens.

Michelangelo Antonioni bestrode the 1960s, which in any case begins to look more and more like the last great decade for European cinema. He also had remarkable prescience about being in the right place at the right time: the industrial North of Italy's economic miracle in the early 1960s; then London, mid-60s capital of the throwaway society; then America, following the trail of the youth cult and the half-baked revolution all the way to Death Valley. In 1972, before it was fashionable to be there, he was filming in China.

The Chinese were not at all pleased with the way he saw them; the American critics reared up in outrage at *Zabriskie Point*; and no one who attended the 1960 Cannes screening of *L'Avventura* is likely to have forgotten the barracking and caterwauling that accompanied the second half of the film. Jeanne Moreau, then a kind of patron saint for bold film-makers, had to be drafted in from nearby to help restore the director's shaken confidence. But an Antonioni attribute that tends to be overlooked is artistic courage.

I had hoped that Sam Rhodie's book might throw more light on the *L'Avventura* screening: it was never quite clear whether the uproar was entirely directed against the film's style or the treatment of its 'story', or whether there could have been an element of festival

claque and cabal. Rhodie is informative about Italian critical attitudes to the early films and about Antonioni's own critical writing, which included a startlingly sympathetic review of the notorious *Jud Süß*. Somewhere around the midpoint, however, the book seems to change course. It skips from a chapter focused mainly on *Tentato Suicidio* (1953) to *Chung Kuo Cina* (1972). Where did the 1960s go? The effect is as jolting as missing a step in the dark.

Admittedly, Rhodie's views on *L'Avventura* and *L'Eclisse* (though hardly *La Notte*, which gets short shrift) and on *Blow Up* and *Zabriskie Point* can be pieced together through a mosaic of references to themes and episodes and the parallels and doublings that run through the films. But this hardly adds up to the full-scale critical confrontation which the early chapters seemed to promise, particularly after Rhodie's rather snuffy dismissal of virtually everything previously written in English about Antonioni as of no account.

Still, the book is a reminder of great moments in cinema. The end of *L'Eclisse*, when the lovers don't meet on the street corner, and we see instead the things that go on there without them (or that we would have ignored if they had been there): the nurse with a pram, the newspaper headline, the trotting horse, the building site and the leaking water butt, the coming of darkness. Or the blowing up of the house in *Zabriskie Point*, the rag-bag trophies of the consumer society flying into the air, after

that premonitory prowling round the silent building which feels like the signal for the end of a world. Or the fabulous seven-minute shot in *The Passenger*, when a man dies in an hotel room while the camera looks on, at once so dispassionately and so involingly, at the comings and goings in the square outside. After seeing an Antonioni film, one could feel that one's perception of a landscape or a street corner or a stack of coloured barrels by a factory gate had been slightly shifted. The look of things in real life simply fell into the configurations of an Antonioni scene.

It is this particular talent, and the sense of the haunting fragility of objects, that ought to keep the films looking as fresh as ever for a new generation. Though the despondency and fatigued lethargy of so many of his characters, particularly in the Italian trilogy, may not be too much in tune with a 1990 audience. But, as Rhodie rightly stresses, the search that is seemingly abandoned (like the quest for Anna in *L'Avventura*) always opens up the film and its characters to a new direction; discoveries are made in those *temps morts* when 'nothing happens'.

Antonioni, now in his late seventies, has been preparing another film. According to Rhodie, it is to be called *The Crew*, and concerns a yacht whose owner has gone missing at sea, and the two versions of what may or may not have happened on board. 'The stories overlay rather than cancel each other . . . as in *Blow Up* . . . what becomes most interesting and most mysterious is this constantly shifting meaning and the elusiveness of the narrative itself, losing a thread, picking up another, moving, but to nowhere in particular.' It is good to hear, as we go to press, that shooting on *The Crew* has started.

Monica Vitti in *L'Eclisse*.



FOURTH OF JULY

The Fourth of July, before the summer hotted up. Steady drizzle has taken over from heavy showers, and the wind is the sort that chases you around corners. We're in Oxford, where the colleges that used merely to look like film sets have now become film sets. Specifically, we're standing under an archway looking out across the New College quad, trying to shelter from the wind behind a camera so swaddled in polythene that the lens peers out of its wrappings like the face of an angry baby.

The length of the quad away, under another gateway, a Victorian funeral procession is lining up for the off. All men, it seems, although when they get closer we spot one small, round, cross-looking woman; all in black, of the donnish sort known as rusty. It's the funeral of an Oxford head of college, and his tokens of office are carried like regalia on plump cushions. After the usual delays, the procession finally begins to move slowly towards the camera: the take is going to run the best part of three minutes. Halfway, an extra-ferocious gust turns several umbrellas inside out and sends mortar boards spinning on to the grass. There's a flurry of umbrellas but no one breaks ranks, though the choirboy leading the march does sneak a final relieved glance straight at the camera. A second take is completed without incident, but one hopes they can use the first: too good a divine intervention to miss.

The film is *American Friends*, directed by Tristram Powell and co-written by the director and Michael Palin, who has been one of the wind-blown marchers. Palin based the script on diaries kept by his great grandfather, an Oxford don at the time in the

middle of the nineteenth century when the colleges were still clinging to a monastic past. Palin meets two American ladies (Connie Booth and Trini Alvarado) while on holiday in Switzerland. They follow him back to Oxford . . . Powell, son of Anthony Powell, is here making his first film for the cinema, though he's a veteran of stylish TV films for the BBC (*Number 27*, *The Kremlin Farewell*), including previous Palin collaborations such as the likeable *East of Ipswich*.

While they lay tracks for the next shot, we take refuge in the cloisters, where along with the memorial plaques to Hugh Gaitskell and Richard Crossman, both New College men, there is a tablet in honour of a Victorian lady who because of the relaxation of the rules was able to enjoy her married life in college. Later, I report this timely find to Tristram Powell.

I'm also struck by two largely irrelevant thoughts. First, that umbrellas, large, black, gents for the use of, must be among the very few objects that have not changed at all since the mid-nineteenth century. Second, that just as we are not very good at producing tennis players of note (this is, of course, during the Wimbledon fortnight), so it is not really surprising that we are not a great film-making nation. If you wanted a quick antidote to California tan, the bogus glamour of Hollywood, etc, you could hardly do better than this average English film crew, spending its midsummer day huddled in anoraks, wiping the drops from runny noses, trying to keep the rain from mixing with the tepid tea in the plastic beakers.

After lunch, the rain has stopped. They are setting up a shot in which Palin walks along the edge of the quad,

in serious conversation with another don, and finally encounters his rival, Alfred Molina. Extras are deployed to cut across their path, making the shot more lively. At one point, an entire American tourist group, some twenty strong, walks straight through the shooting area, apparently taking this to be just another aspect of Oxford life—which, of course, these days it is. I eavesdrop on the extras, some grumbling that the pay might have been better and the hours shorter with the commercial elsewhere in town.

The sun comes out. Some of the tourists sneak back, spot Michael Palin, who is ambling abstractedly between takes, and have to be restrained from going after him with their own video cameras. During filming, bits of metal and polythene that are not actually being held down break loose and whip and clatter in the wind. Patiently, they start another take . . . and another . . . A summer day on location on an English movie.

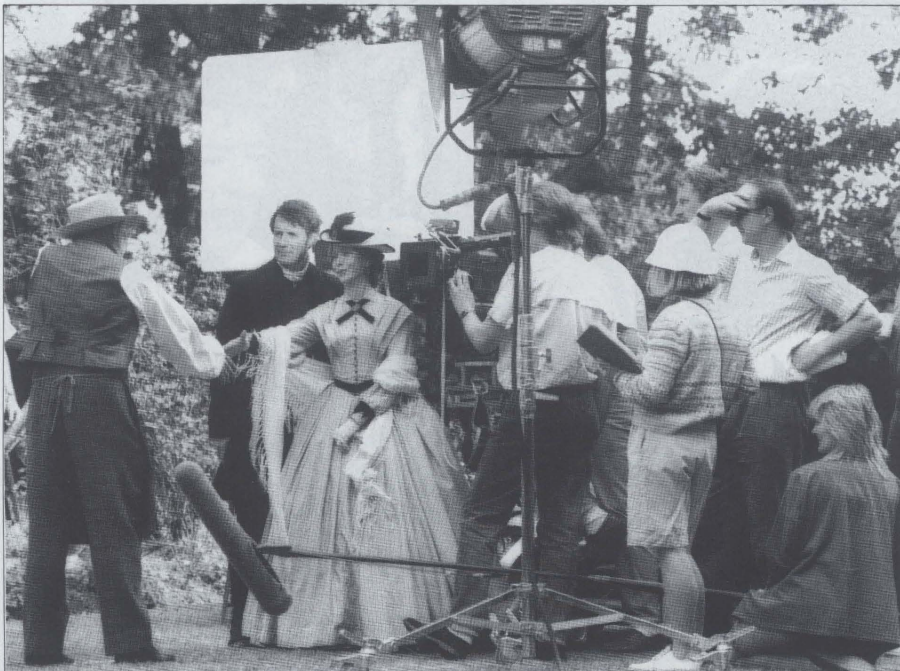
GREAT AND GOOD

The Praemium Imperiale would not seem so far to have made much of a stir in the world. Perhaps it's that the name doesn't trip readily off the tongue; or there could be some resistance to anything that smacks of Japanese cultural imperialism. In fact, it's an ambitious effort, now in its second year, to establish a sort of Nobel Prize equivalent for the arts.

Prizes, including a hefty \$100,000 cheque, are awarded annually in five areas: painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and theatre and film, a shared category which may—and certainly should—soon be divided, even if that means an extra prize. The organisers are the Japan Art Association, founded in 1887, with long-standing support from the imperial family, and now chaired by Mr Nobutaka Shikanai, with his son Hiroaki as vice-chairman. The Shikanais, I'm told, also have extensive Japanese media interests. The first film/theatre prize went to Marcel Carné; this year's to Federico Fellini. In fact, no 1990 prize-winner was under sixty: the merely promising need not apply.

Astutely, the organisers have appointed a remarkable quintet of international advisers: Helmut Schmidt, Jacques Chirac, Amintore Fanfani, David Rockefeller and our own Mr Edward Heath. All five were on parade for an exceptionally well attended press conference at Claridge's in June, to say all the right things about art and peace and international cooperation while Mr Hiroaki Shikanai announced the 1990 winners. Japanese selection committees take over from the advisers; London this year hosts the announcement occasion; and it all moves at a suitably statesmanlike pace towards an awards ceremony in Tokyo in October.

American Friends: Michael Palin, Connie Booth. Tristram Powell standing, right.



But who advises the advisers? Helmut Schmidt said his consultations took him a day, and that David Rockefeller had given the process two days. An American reporter asked for, and was promised, the names of the people Rockefeller talked to. Later, I asked Mr Heath whom he had consulted about the film/theatre prize. With the greatest geniality, he preferred not to answer. 'David, being an American, set up a committee. But I have so many friends in all these fields . . . In any event, he had clearly put much energy into Britain's hosting of the show.'

So what about the 1991 prizes? Where Fellini comes, can Bergman be far behind? Or Antonioni? Kurosawa would be a natural candidate, but the Japanese, though saying they want to broaden the prizes beyond their present Europe/America base, won't at this early stage give an award to one of their own. Closer home, there is of course Sir David and, if he isn't still a bit young for it, Sir Richard. At which point, rather surprisingly, one begins to run out of names that carry the appropriate hallmarks of achievement, weight and international standing. America has lost most of its grand old men of movies. Elia Kazan? Fred Zinnemann? Never quite the maverick Billy Wilder. But if Mr Heath should be thinking about names for 1991, how about Satyajit Ray? Non-European, non-American, non-Japanese, and a truly great filmmaker.

EUROPE VS HOLLYWOOD

Some interesting statistics taken from the useful journal *Screen Finance*, which in turn acknowledges the Centre National du Cinéma as its principal source.

In 1988, the last year for which figures are available, 97% of the American box-office take went to American films. In Britain, American films accounted for 80% of the box office, with 15% going to British films and a mere 5%, therefore, left for everything else. Of the other European countries in the survey (France, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and West Germany), only France kept the American share under 50% (at 45.9%); and France also recorded by far the most respectable take for the home product (39%), with Italy a rather distant runner-up (28.5%).

In the same year, America produced 511 films and the six European countries between them a seemingly competitive 447—with France again leading the way and Britain trailing, if one discounts the Netherlands, with its very low level of production. *Screen Finance* reckons, however, that fewer than 50 of the European films will have been seen outside their country of origin. 'Thus, each European territory is fighting its own battle with Hollywood.'

For cinema alone, US revenues in

Europe were reckoned at nearly \$700m; £c revenues in the United States at a mere \$43m. Add television and video, and the trade balance becomes \$1,765m in favour of the United States. No wonder *Screen Finance* headlined its story 'How Europeans are losing the battle with Hollywood'.

KOCKENLOCKER'S FAREWELL

Some years ago, I did a stint on this column as Kockenlocker. I chose the pseudonym for the scene in *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* where the Kockenlockers debate the probability of the soldier Betty Hutton has so inconveniently mislaid being called Ratziwatski. (Momentarily, Ratziwatski seemed an inviting alternative; but wiser counsels, as they say, prevailed.) There was also a certain feeling, possibly fellow-feeling, for officer Kockenlocker, the gallant if neanderthal smalltown policeman clinging to his sense of order and reason in the face of everything a Preston Sturges script could throw at him.

Once, watching on a movieola the scene in which Kockenlocker (William Demarest) tries to persuade Eddie Bracken to break out of his jail, I laughed so excessively that I fell off my stool, thereby I suppose achieving the condition known as rolling in the aisles. A kind of female Kockenlocker then employed by the National Film Archive appeared in the doorway, sighed theatrically, and made off with the rebuke, 'No one laughs at the films we show here.'

This is my final issue as editor of *SIGHT AND SOUND*, after what long-serving readers may well regard as an

unconscionable time. I considered marking the occasion with an article on some such subject as film magazines, their present and future prospects, but it began to look more and more like 'Brother, Where Art Thou?', the dismal movie Sullivan is longing to make at the start of *Sullivan's Travels*.

As far back as *Close Up*, no film magazine with any kind of serious intentions has probably been able to survive without some form of patronage or subsidy. Certainly, *SIGHT AND SOUND* could not have lasted ten minutes without the support of the BFI. But for a variety of reasons, the future for this type of magazine now looks particularly insecure: too many in Europe and America have gone under, or have kept going only through compromise.

'There's nothing like a deep-dish movie for driving you into the open,' Veronica Lake warns Sullivan. It didn't seem quite the moment for achieving the same effect with a deep-dish article. Friends suggested a reminiscent piece, but that looked an invitation to self-indulgence. All in all, it seemed as well to leave the last word to Kockenlocker.

On a last, personal note, I would like to thank all our contributors. I'm particularly pleased and grateful to be publishing in this issue articles by Lindsay Anderson, my mentor when I took over as editor of *SIGHT AND SOUND*, and David Robinson, a colleague from early years. And I'm grateful to Susan Ray, Nicholas Ray's widow, for sending us 'On Directing', making a kind of companion piece to an article by Nicholas Ray which we published in 1956, my first year as editor.

KOCKENLOCKER

The Miracle at Morgan's Creek: Kockenlocker (William Demarest) and daughters.





ANIMATION

THE FIRST CHAPTER 1833-1893

DAVID ROBINSON

Most acted films of the early years of cinema inevitably look quaint and archaic today. Yet animation films made by Emile Cohl as early as 1908, by Winsor McKay from 1910 and by Ladislav Starevich in 1911 appear to us undated—as ‘modern’ and amusing, even though they are in black and white, as any animation work done since. The simple explanation is that the art of animation did not begin with cinema proper. Although the cartoon film-makers were using a new medium, in the camera and the celluloid film, they were employing basic animation techniques that had been practised and developed for upwards of seventy years before the cinema.

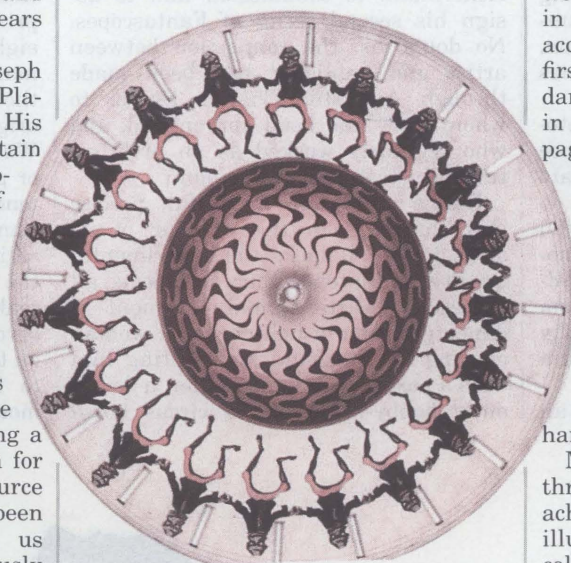
The first true animator was Joseph Plateau. Born in Brussels in 1801, Plateau is best known as a physicist. His doctoral thesis in 1829, ‘On Certain Properties of the Impressions Produced by Light upon the Organ of Sight’, marked a crucial stage in the development of motion pictures. Pursuing the same line of research as Peter Mark Roget and Faraday in England, Plateau described the phenomenon called at that time ‘the persistence of vision’. This referred to the property in the human system of vision, of retaining a fading sense of a visual impression for a fraction of a second after the source of the impression has actually been removed. This is what permits us to perceive a film as a continuously moving image rather than the rapid succession of still pictures which it is in fact.

Faraday had made a device to demonstrate the principle, consisting of toothed or spoked wheels which revolved one in front of each other. Plateau ingeniously simplified the device, creating a simple cardboard disc with slots cut around the edge. When the disc was spun in front of a mirror, and its reflection viewed through the rapidly moving slots, the viewer had the impression that the disc was actually stationary.

Plateau next drew upon the perimeter of the disc a series of drawings, representing gradually changing phases of a

figure or object in motion. When the spinning disc was now viewed in the mirror, the images not only appeared to be stationary on the disc, but the successive phases blended together to give the impression of a single continuous action within the images. Plateau had devised the earliest form of moving picture.

So much for his scientific achievement, which is fully recorded elsewhere. What is important for the history of animation is that Plateau was not only



Plateau's prancing monkeys (1833).

a scientist. He was also an artist. His father was a landscape and flower painter, and entered his son into the Academy of Design in Brussels. When Joseph was fourteen, however, his parents died, leaving him as a ward to an uncle, who decided that he should study science. But Plateau was persistent, and continued to pursue art alongside science. The combination of interests stood him in good stead when he came to dedicate himself to the study of vision.

Plateau first announced the invention of his ‘Phenakistiscope’ or ‘Fantascope’

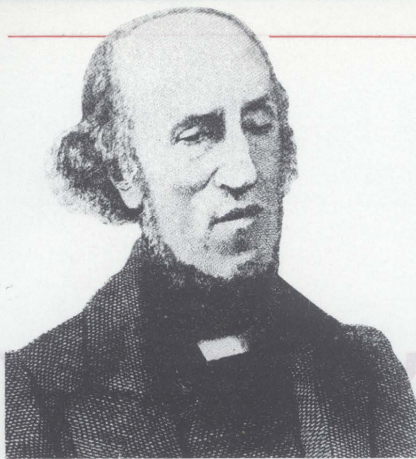
on 20 January 1833. In July 1833 the discs were put on the market by Rudolph Ackermann, the fashionable London publisher, as the ‘Phantasmagoscope, designed by Professor Plateau of Brussels’. There seems no doubt that Plateau himself designed the whole series of six. ‘I drew the models with great care,’ he wrote at the time. ‘These models now constitute a new instrument which the public in London know as the Fantascope’ (the name was used in this form by Ackermann for the second series of discs).

The variety, invention and accomplishment of these six animated cartoons would be astounding, even if they were not the world's very first essay in the technique. The simplest (and according to his scientific writings the first that Plateau drew) simply shows a dancer in doublet and hose spinning in a pirouette (see illustration at top of page), but the movement is perfect.

Plateau had discovered moreover that the figure in motion need not remain on the spot, as his little dancer does: it could move across what we would now call ‘the frame’. On another disc a series of frogs, articulated with wonderful zoological observation, hop past the viewer. On a third a circle of demonic, dressed-up monkeys prance hand in hand.

Most extraordinary, however, are the three remaining discs, on which Plateau achieves startling three-dimensional illusions. On the simplest, a spiral of coloured circles, growing larger as they approach the outer edge of the disc, gives a quite psychedelic impression of balls changing colour as they emerge from the centre of the disc to bombard the viewer. On another, snakes wriggle out of a dark hole at the centre of the disc. Plateau's masterpiece, though, is a disc on which demonic green death's heads appear to emerge from an infinite hole, growing larger as they approach and pass the viewer. As a piece of Gothic horror it compares with the Phantasmagoria showpieces of Plateau's fellow-countryman, Etienne Robertson.

Plateau lived and worked on until 1883, though for the last forty years of his life this man who contributed so



Joseph Plateau.

much to mankind's visual experience was blind—the result of gazing at the sun in the course of his optical researches in the 1820s.

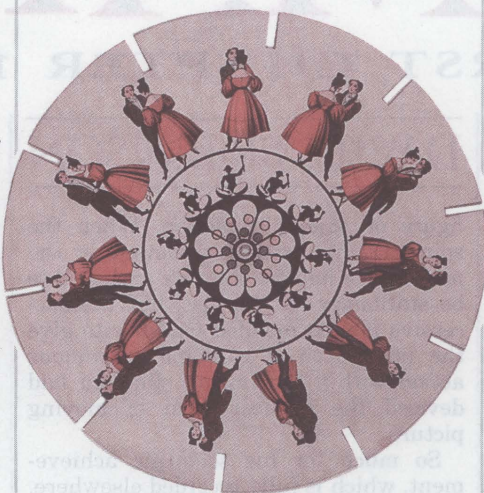
Plateau's claim as the father of motion pictures is not unchallenged. At almost exactly the same time a Viennese Professor of Geometry, Simon Stampfer, created a device identical to the Phenakistiscope/Fantascopes, which he called the Stroboscope. Chronology, however, seems to give priority to Plateau, by a few weeks. I have been unable to trace any discs by Stampfer, so cannot compare his work as an animator. Stampfer, however, deserves credit for one particular piece of foresight: 'It is clear that in this way it will be possible not only to represent the different movements of a human being or an animal, but also machines running, or even actions of longer duration, theatrical representations or scenes from nature.'

This anticipation of the cinematograph is the more remarkable since Plateau, Stampfer and their immediate successors were restricted to actions so brief as could be reduced to the 20 phases or less that could be accommodated on the circumference of a cardboard disc. (Plateau's discs varied from 15 to 19 images.) It was to be sixty years before a device which permitted a continuous, non-repetitive action.

The Fantascopes was evidently an

instant success with the London public, and Ackermann brought out two further series. All three confusingly bear the same date, of July 1833.

The designers of the two succeeding series, the first British animators, were both distinguished artists in other fields. Thomas Talbot Bury (1811-1877), who was 22 at this time, became a successful architect, worked with Augustus Welby Pugin on the detail of the Houses of Parliament and designed 85 churches. He was particularly renowned for his architectural drawing, and was an expert lithographer. No doubt it was this ability which led



Bury's miniature ballroom (1833).

Ackermann to commission him to design his second series of Fantascopes. No doubt too the connection between artist and publisher had been made through Augustus Charles Pugin, to whom Bury had been apprenticed, and who regularly worked as an architectural illustrator for Ackermann.

Bury's animation is skilful, precise and charming in the humour of its subjects; but it lacks the experimental quality of Plateau. Bury's subjects all represent realistic animal movement—a dancing couple, a bell-ringer, a woman chasing her husband and beating him with a poker, an Indian juggler, a dandy on a hobby-horse and a circus horse

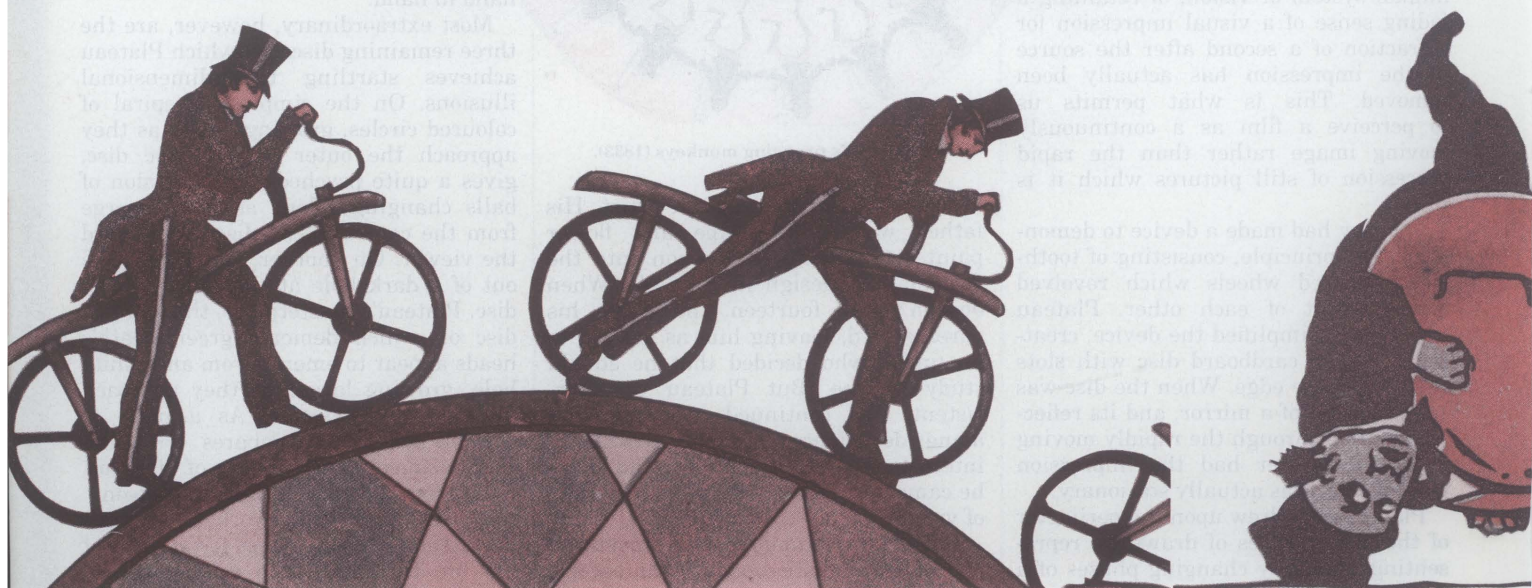
which leaps through a hoop. Bury enjoyed the style of movement across the 'frame'. Only the bell-ringer and the juggler remain static. The dancers swirl around the disc's miniature ballroom with peculiar elegance. A characteristic of Bury's Fantascopes is his habit of putting a secondary action—abstract patterns, an acrobat, a squirrel in a treadmill—in the centre of the disc.

The third of Ackermann's animators was Thomas Mann Baynes (1794-1854), who exhibited for many years as a landscape painter, but was, like Bury, also an accomplished lithographer. I have so far been unable to locate a complete set of Baynes' Fantascopes. In one of them, though, he appears to have pursued Plateau's experiments with the stereoscopic illusion: fantastic, tape-like serpents corkscrew from the centre of the disc. Other discs—a rocking horse, a guardsman riding—resemble Bury's representational images.

One Baynes animation is notable: he was the first to try to represent a bird in flight. The problems of analysing bird flight were to fascinate Jules Marey and the 'chronophotographers' of the 1880s; and to this day remain the greatest challenge to film animators.

The Fantascopes was imitated, under a bewildering variety of names, by other publishers in London, Paris and Berlin—to the irritation of Plateau, who felt that his invention was betrayed by inferior drawing.

It is true that no succeeding publications ever matched the quality of the printing, graphics and animation of the eighteen animations in the three Ackermann series. The repertory was nevertheless enlarged. A series apparently originated by the London publisher E. Wallis, which was endlessly reprinted or pirated, discovered the fascination of machinery, with an ingenious animation of a mechanical sawmill. The same series showed a taste for the fantastic in the anonymous artist: a Ceres figure makes an odd progress perched on a revolving wheel; a winged angel seems on the point of carrying a willowy youth to heaven; birds fly into the gaping mouth of a grotesque head.



In the late 1860s the optical principles of the Phenakistiscope were incorporated into a somewhat more complex viewing device, the Zoetrope or Zootrope, which dispensed with the need for viewing through a mirror. The zoetrope—also known as the Wheel of Life—consisted of a metal drum revolving on a pedestal, its sides pierced with a regular series of slits. The animated images were drawn or printed on long strips of paper which were placed around the inner circumference of the drum, and viewed through the slits as it revolved. Additionally, animations could be printed on discs which were placed in the bottom of the drum. The number of slits was usually thirteen: the animations similarly consisted of thirteen phases, except where a figure was represented as moving across and out of the 'frame', in which case there would be fourteen.

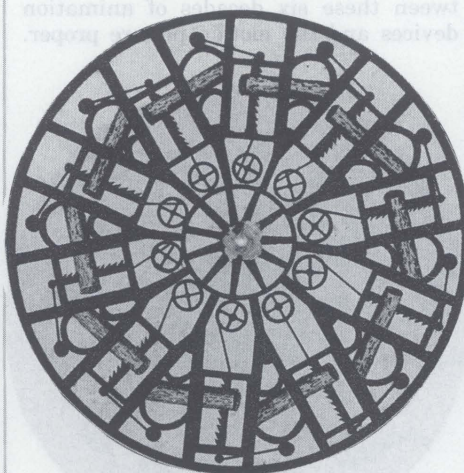
The main English producer of zoetropes was the London Stereoscopic Company. With one remarkable exception, the names of the artists who designed the 84 strips (issued in series of 12) and 12 discs published by this company are unknown. The first two series are apparently the work of the same artist and are markedly superior to the succeeding issues. Printed in black and red or black and green, they are drawn with strong silhouettes, in appreciation that much is lost when the strips are viewed in the zoetrope.

The strip animations are individually titled; and the best of them represent some of the first true classics of animation. 'Headwork', an anticipation of Disney's *Skeleton Dance*, depicts grotesque dancing figures who remove their heads, passing them from one to the other around the circle. 'The Little Umbrella Man' scuttles through a storm, pursued by forks of lightning. 'A Large Feeder' is a portent of *Modern Times*, a man being stuffed by a mechanical feeding machine which chops the food before forking it into his mouth. The exquisite 'Fish and Fowl' shows porpoise gracefully threading the waves as gulls soar overhead. The best of the London Stereoscopic Company

animations are so amusing or decorative in conception that the repetition of a single phase seems no limitation.

The London Stereoscopic Company's discs were also ingenious and amusing, sometimes using centrifugal movement to produce the kind of three-dimensional effects that Plateau had achieved. Little men dive into the mouth of a lion; multiple Blondins walk a high wire; goblins are shot out of guns; swimmers or men on ladders escape from the centre of the drum and disappear into its walls.

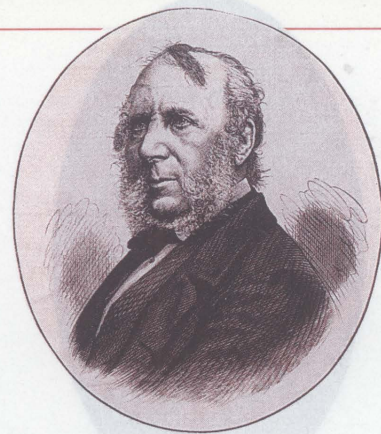
The zoetrope was a scientific toy designed to be used with a certain tech-



Wallis' mechanical sawmill (c 1835).

nique. An explanatory leaflet gave directions about the optimum speed and direction of rotation for individual animations; and suggested that curious effects of superimposition could be obtained by overlapping two different strips in the drum at the same time. Animation was already reaching out to wider possibilities.

The London Stereoscopic Company's down-market rival was H. G. Clarke of Garrick Street. Clarke was merely a penny publisher specialising in the juvenile market. Most of his output consisted of cut-out models, badly printed by woodcut on sheets of cheap paper, folded into a brightly coloured



George Cruikshank.

cover. Clarke, however, claimed to have been the first to introduce the zoetrope to the English market, in July 1867.

While the London Stereoscopic Company sold their sets of 12 strips for four shillings, Clarke's came at the knock-down price of one penny for a sheet of three. No doubt Clarke could afford to sell at one-twelfth the price of his rival, since the majority of his strips were shamelessly pirated from the London Stereoscopic Company. The few designs that he originated tend to be engaging in their humour and primitive draughtsmanship but not very effective in animation.

Yet Clarke made one notable contribution to the development of animation, with a series of 24 discs for use in the base of the zoetrope. Plateau, as we have seen, had included one purely abstract design among his first animations, but the initiative had hardly been followed. Practically all the Clarke discs, however, were purely abstract—vigorous designs of revolving balls, shooting stars, arrows and ribbons, that swirled and spiralled when viewed through the slots in the sides of the spinning drum. Clarke's catalogue describes them as 'Beautiful chromatrope', which indicates that they had been inspired by the kaleidoscopic lantern slides that were popular under this name. Yet the lantern slides produced their effect mechanically, while Clarke's discs were animated by the motion picture principle. Thus by chance some

Left: Bury's bicyclists (1833).

Below and right: Cruikshank's fat man and pop-eyed owl (see next page).





Emile Reynaud.

anonymous Victorian journeyman engraver produced the first consistent body of abstract animations, a strange and in its own right bewitching portent of kinetic art.

The single exception to the rule of anonymity that prevailed among the pioneer animators who worked for the London zoetrope suppliers was one of the most celebrated artists of Georgian and Victorian England, George Cruikshank (1792-1878).

Among their novelties for Christmas 1870, the London Stereoscopic Company advertised 'Twelve New Designs for the Wheel of Life, by George Cruikshank. Price 4s the set . . . The Company are happy to announce that they have made arrangements with the above eminent artist to produce this special series of sketches for the Wheel of Life.' Cruikshank, though his work was no longer so much in demand or in style as it had been a quarter of a century before, was still revered as the dean of book illustrators and satirical caricaturists; and it was a considerable coup to get him to work for the zoetrope.

For Cruikshank, nearing eighty, it must have represented an extraordinary challenge to attempt the quite new art of animation. The zoetrope strips he produced suggest that he enjoyed the challenge and the task. They are carefully animated; and Cruikshank uses bold outlines and silhouettes to ensure that the animation is fully effective when viewed in the zoetrope. He prefers simple visual jokes. A fat man falls over

Below: Reynaud's lady on horseback (1877).
Below right: The Praxinoscope.

and keeps on rolling ('Roly Poly'), a fisherman is swallowed up by a large fish ('The Biter Bit'), a pompous little man has his umbrella blown inside out ('A Rude Blast'). Some ('A Dainty Dish', 'Three Blind Mice', 'Bombastes Furioso') attempt an element of narrative. But Cruikshank's great strength as an animator is his ability to create character. The pop-eyed owl with an umbrella in 'Out for the Day' is more characterful than many a comedy figure in fully developed film cartoons.

Indisputably the greatest animator of the pre-cinema era, Emile Reynaud, with his *Pantomimes Lumineuses* of 1892, provided the ultimate link between these six decades of animation devices and the motion picture proper.



Plateau's snakes (1833).

Unlike those of his predecessors mentioned in this article, Reynaud's story has been told elsewhere. He was born in Montreuil-sous-Bois (where Méliès would one day build his studio) in 1844. In 1876 he invented his 'Praxinoscope'.

Reynaud perceived that the major problem of both the praxinoscope and the zoetrope was that viewing through narrow slots cut out 90 per cent of the light reflected from the image. He therefore sought an alternative means to provide the necessary condition of appearing to arrest each successive image; and came up with the idea of a polygon of mirrors revolving at the centre of a drum rather like that of the zoetrope, but without the viewing slits. The designs on the strip placed round the inner circumference of the drum are reflected in the polygon, whose turning

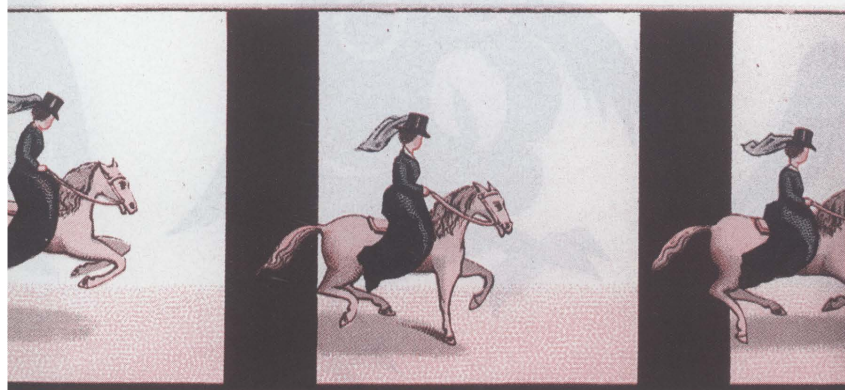
faces thus offer each successive image to the eye.

Having put his Praxinoscope on sale, Reynaud produced an improvement in 1878 with the 'Praxinoscope Theatre', a viewing device which made it possible to isolate the individual image within a proscenium frame, and to superimpose a background. Reynaud's next step was to combine the praxinoscope with the magic lantern in the projection praxinoscope.

Finally, in 1892, came the *Pantomimes Lumineuses*. Reynaud recognised that the ultimate handicap of all preceding moving picture devices was the limit of the repeating, one-cycle movement. He took the giant step of mounting his images on a continuous, unlimited band, which ran between two spools. The animator was liberated: in his little theatre in the Musée Grévin, Reynaud was now able to present short plays, projected on a screen, superimposed upon decors. It was now a very short step from the *Pantomimes Lumineuses* to the cinema. Ironically, the arrival of Lumière's *Cinématographe* in 1896 was one of the factors which brought the demise of Reynaud's enchanting spectacle.

Here, though, we remember Reynaud as an animator who is recognised by such a contemporary director as Richard Williams as one of the greatest masters of the craft. The children, the circus artists, the performing animals who figure in the bands Reynaud designed for the praxinoscope are, despite their miniature format, animated with tremendous care for detail and sense of weight and mass (Richard Williams points to the way the braid of a skipping girl's hair bounces as she lands on the ground). The children who play in the snow run and slide in and out of the three-dimensional recesses of the scene. The characters in the surviving fragments of Reynaud's *Pantomimes Autour d'un Cabane* and *Pauvre Pierrot* are beautifully grave, gravely beautiful and vividly alive.

By the time the movies proper arrived, then, the animators of the nineteenth century had produced somewhere in excess of 300 little animations—for the most part restricted to no more than 20 phases of movement, but allowing opportunities for ranging experiment and expertise. The cinema benefited as heir to a seventy-year-old tradition.



MILOU IN MAY¹⁵

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I was recently asked to appear on *In Touch*, the BBC's weekly radio programme for the blind—or rather, as described in the *Radio Times* and on the air, 'for the visually handicapped'. The invitation set off a train of thought—cinema for the blind, cinema about the blind, cinema of the blind.

Oddly, it is the last of these that has for me the most immediate resonance. In the first Czechoslovak Republic after the First World War, all cinemas were licensed to unions, fraternal organisations and charities, which gave their names to the premises and sublet them to commercial managements. In his memoir *Conversations with Kafka*, Gustav Janouch recalls getting a job in the small orchestra that accompanied movies shown at the Bio Slepçu, or Cinema of the Blind, in a working-class district of Prague.

When he told his idol Franz Kafka where he was employed, the novelist, 'first opened his eyes wide, then the next moment laughed louder than I ever heard him to before or since. Then he said: "Bio Slepçu! Every cinema should be called that. Their flickering images blind people to reality".'

Wanting to pay Kafka a compliment, Janouch remarked that his writings were, 'in today's Cinema of the Blind only a mirror of tomorrow,' and suggested that he should give up his job and concentrate on writing. 'Kafka nodded. "Yes, I should. I wanted to creep away from behind this office desk, but it only increases my weakness. It's become—,"' Kafka looked at me with an indescribably painful smile, "—a cinema of the blind".'

Janouch later invited Kafka to accompany him to a Chaplin festival. When he refused, Janouch asked if he actually disliked the cinema and Kafka replied: 'As a matter of fact, I've never thought about it. Of course it is a marvellous toy. But I cannot bear it, perhaps I am too "optical" by nature. I am an Eye-man. But the cinema disturbs one's vision. The speed of the movements of the camera and the rapid changes of images force men to look continually from one to another. Sight does not master the pictures, it is the pictures which master one's sight. They flood one's consciousness. The cinema involves putting the eye into uniform, when before it was naked.'

Kafka is expressing personal fears about the overwhelming impact of movie images. But underlying what he says is the charge that cinema reinforces our too ready acceptance of the world as it appears, our reluctance to penetrate the illusory surface of people and things. The greatest work of art to use blindness as a recurrent metaphor is, most people would agree, *King Lear*. The play's very first reference to blindness comes in the opening minutes, when Goneril begins her exaggerated protestation of filial devotion by telling her father: 'Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter/Dearer than eyesight, space and liberty.'

C P H I L I P Cinema

It is no accident that vision should be the first quality she mentions to elevate her affections. We recognise this as the first lie in the play, and it is Goneril who, in one of the most chilling lines in dramatic literature, prescribes the punishment that her brother-in-law Cornwall should inflict on the Earl of Gloucester: 'Pluck out his eyes.' It is, however, after the appalling scene in which his eyes are gouged out that the bluff, generous Gloucester begins to see reality, to experience the world in both its horror and its sublimity, and to recognise the true worth of his son Edgar.

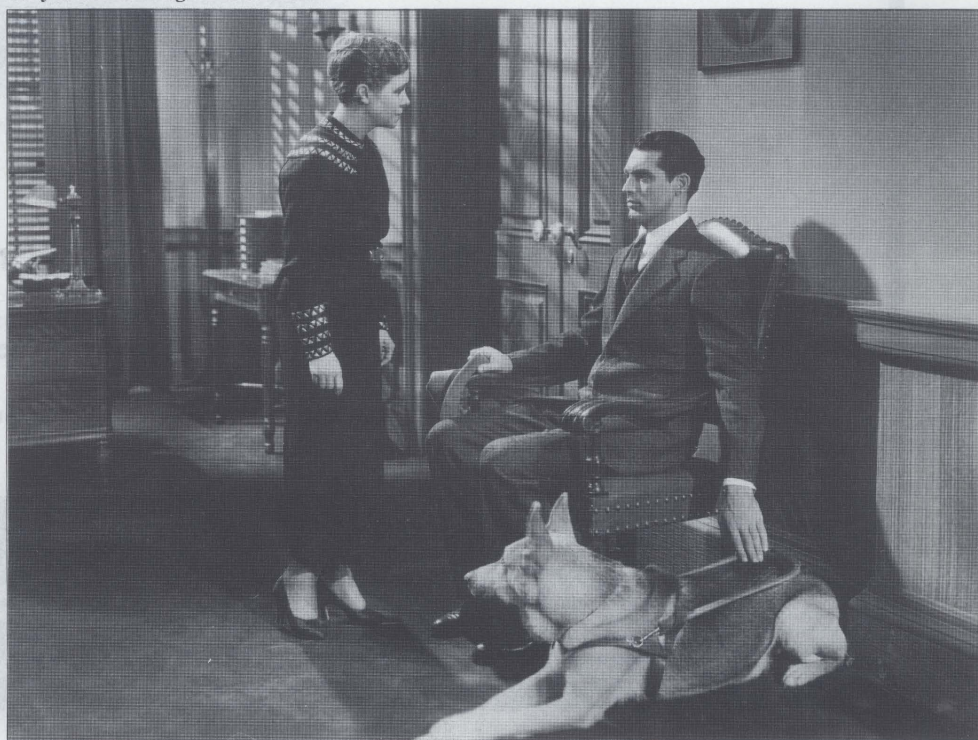
There have been several films of *King Lear*. The most notable are Kosintsev's 1970 Russian version (that used Shakespeare's text for its subtitles), Peter Brook's movie of the same year, shot on bleak Jutland locations and based on his great Beckettian Stratford-upon-Avon production of 1962 starring Paul Scofield, and more recently Kurosawa's magnificent *Ran*, which in transposing the play to medieval Japan illuminated Shakespeare's text in the process of dispensing with most of it.

Surprisingly (because he admires these films), Leslie Halliwell doesn't mention *Lear* in the interesting column-

length entry on Blindness in his *Filmgoer's Companion*. This is odd because Shakespeare's play has a tragic sense of life missing from most other movies about the blind. Halliwell's entry begins: 'Blindness, a tragic affliction, has generally been treated by film-makers with discretion, though not without sentimentality.' He goes on to list a dozen or more examples, including Herbert Marshall as the blind pianist in *The Enchanted Cottage*, Cary Grant in *Wings in the Dark*, Cagney in *City for Conquest*, Nicol Williamson as the blinded tycoon in Tony Richardson's *Laughter in the Dark*, a poor transposition from Weimar Germany to Swing-

ing London of Nabokov's masterly book, one of the best novels on the theme of blindness. Halliwell names some blind villains and the occasional blind private-eye, and he touches on that recurrent subject of thrillers, the blind heroine turning the tables on her tormentors. He singles out for special praise the performance of O. P. Heggie as the Blind Hermit who befriends the monster in *Bride of Frankenstein*. As he doesn't touch on the comic treatment of the blind (by W. C. Fields and Richard Lester, for instance), there is no reference to one of

Cary Grant in *Wings in the Dark*.



F R E N C H OF THE Blind

the high points of Mel Brooks' *Young Frankenstein*, where the Blind Hermit sequence in James Whale's 1935 classic is parodically reprised. Gene Hackman plays the Hermit and all his kindly acts go wrong. He pours scalding soup over the Monster's lap and sets him on fire while attempting to light a cigar. Brooks succeeds here because he manages to be hilariously funny while making the same point about the Hermit's essential goodness and his indifference to the Monster's forbidding appearance.

The Hermit in *Young Frankenstein* is a comic character because he has only one of the two key characteristics of the archetypal blind hero or heroine. He has attained a higher spiritual condition as a result of his affliction (in most films this is preceded by a period of anger and frustration), but he hasn't developed that heightened sense of taste, touch, hearing, judgment of space, sharpness of instinct and existential perception of good and bad faith. The combination of these talents is what makes the cinema's blind heroes and heroines such formidable people: the young Helen Keller in *The Miracle Worker*; the omniscient blind housewife played by Audrey Hepburn seeing off a gang invading her Manhat-

tan basement in *Wait Until Dark*; the sightless seer played by Hilary Mason in Nicolas Roeg's *Don't Look Now*, whose gift of second-sight challenges the wide-eyed, sceptical visionary, Donald Sutherland.

The beautiful young flower-girl in Chaplin's *City Lights* is a saintly figure, worthy of the Tramp's worship. But when her sight is restored, she becomes commonplace, incapable of seeing beyond the deceptive surfaces of the world until she touches the Tramp. *City Lights* is indeed a reversal of *King Lear*, with the flower-girl taking Gloucester's journey in the opposite direction.

Two striking uses of blindness occur in American films from this past year. The first is in Woody Allen's *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, where the tormented protagonist (Martin Landau) has the emblematic profession of ophthalmologist, and he courts tragedy and disgrace by rejecting the enlightened moral advice of a rabbi (Sam Waterston) who is going blind. The second is in the violent comedy thriller *Blind Fury*, the first Hollywood movie by Phillip Noyce, the Australian director of *Newsfront*. The film's hero is Nick Parker, a US Marine blinded in Indo-China, written

off as dead, his name recorded on the Vietnam Memorial in Washington. But Nick is restored to health in a remote Asian village where he receives instruction in the martial arts. Twenty years after being reported missing in action, Nick returns to America, a samurai sword in his blindman's walking-stick, his senses heightened to the *n*th degree, his mind and soul composed through meditation. After looking up an old comrade-in-arms, he stumbles into a gang war and cuts a bloody swathe across America from Florida to Nevada as he escorts his friend's nine-year-old son to meet his father.

Blind Fury is a canny mixture of genres—the sober, liberal post-World War II pictures about blind servicemen adjusting to postwar life (John Garfield in *Pride of the Marines*; Arthur Kennedy in *Bright Victory*, aka *Lights Out*); the cycle concerning alienated Vietnam vets; the didactic films involving martial arts and mysticism, typified by *The Karate Kid*. The producer of *Blind Fury*, Tim Matheson, acknowledges the influence of the Japanese film series starring Zatoichi as a blind samurai hero.

The sequence in which Nick first demonstrates his fighting skills when provoked by a gang of Chicano rednecks at the bar of a roadside diner alludes knowingly and specifically to an identical encounter between the one-armed Spencer Tracy and the crude racist Ernest Borgnine in *Bad Day at Black Rock*. This seminal scene more or less introduced oriental martial arts into an American context. Like Tracy's Macreedy, Rutger Hauer's Nick Parker only resorts to violence when severely provoked, and the Dutch actor brings to the role the same mixture of charm, menace and disarming humour that we see in *Legend of the Holy Drinker* and his Guinness commercials. A touch of the demonic puts an abrasive edge on his saintliness.

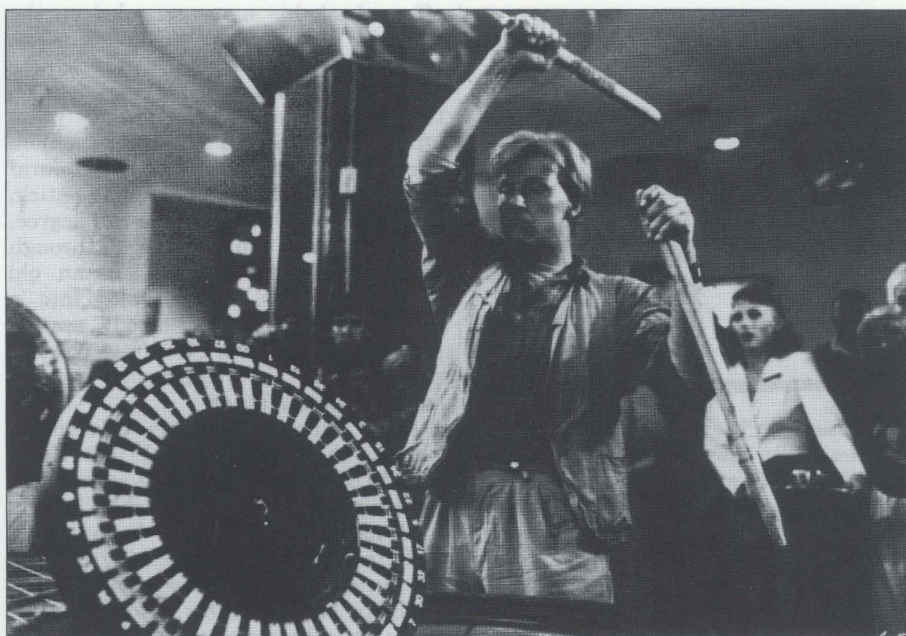
Gene Hackman as the Blind Hermit in *Young Frankenstein*.



The two most famous writers of the twentieth century to go blind were both passionate moviegoers (unlike several of the illustrious public figures appointed to preside over the British Board of Film Censors, who have combined poor sight with ignorance of the cinema). James Joyce returned home in 1909 to open Dublin's first cinema, the Volta Picture Theatre. Jorge Luis Borges, who wrote with great insight on Joyce as well as on Shakespeare and Kafka, published some remarkable film criticism.

Borges' short story *Averroes' Search* (included in *A Personal Anthology*) came immediately to mind when I considered the problem of talking to blind people about the cinema. The hero of the fable is Abu-al-Walid Muhammad ibn-Ahmad ibn-Rushd, an Islamic scholar living in medieval Cordoba and writing a commentary on Aristotle. In a translation of the *Poetics* he comes across the words tragedy and comedy, and having no knowledge of what theatre is, he is puzzled.

By chance the following day he is at a



Rutger Hauer practising martial arts in *Blind Fury*.

dinner party where one of his fellow guests is a merchant lately returned from China. The merchant describes a strange social ritual he attended in a painted wooden house that makes no rational sense to him and the other guests, but which we recognise as the performance of a play in a theatre. Averroes goes back to his desk having come within a hair's breadth of understanding the meaning of comedy and tragedy, but doesn't put the two things together and thus proceeds confidently to misinterpret Aristotle. 'I sensed,' says Borges as narrator, 'that Averroes, striving to imagine a drama without having suspected what a theatre was, was no more absurd than I, who strove to imagine Averroes with no material other than some fragments from Renan, Lane and Asin Palacios.'

How then does one convey the experience of cinema to blind people? The nearest I have come to what it must be like to be a blind person in a movie house was back in the 1940s when BBC radio had a regular 45-minute programme on Saturday afternoons called *A Seat in the Circle*, broadcast live from a provincial cinema, usually in the north of England. A posh BBC announcer in a confidential whisper would welcome listeners. Then after filling us in on what had happened to date (the movie was invariably joined some way in), he or she would comment on the action where necessary. Listeners couldn't see the screen but they could hear the peculiar acoustic of a film soundtrack in a large picture palace and experience the reactions of the audience.

Blind people are fascinated by the movies, I'm told, and my interviewer on the *In Touch* programme, himself blind, though not from birth, was too young to have heard *A Seat in the Circle* and wanted to talk with me about the American innovation AudioVision. Radio is the greatest medium for the blind. What they're totally cut off from

is cinema in its purest form, the silent movie. Radio, however, is wholly denied to the deaf, except by way of physical vibration, an experience analogous to the way unsighted people can appreciate sculpture by touch. The coming of sound excluded the deaf from films, a matter currently being corrected by television and subtitled video-cassettes.

AudioVision, which does for the blind what subtitles do for the deaf (though the deaf have to imagine sound effects and music), is the brainchild of Gregory Frazer, a former student at San Francisco State University, where it was developed under the aegis of the Dean of Creative Arts, August Coppola, brother of Francis Ford Coppola. It is a guide for the unsighted to a movie and can be heard on a single earphone by infra-red, short-wave or wire, and any auditorium can quite easily be equipped.

AudioVision was publicly tested for the first time in Europe last December when a dubbed version of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* was shown to an audience of the sight-impaired. The French presenters were given three guidelines. First, the timing must be such that the dialogue is respected. Second, the descriptions must be objective—just what you see. Third, the tone of the commentary must not compromise or disturb the mood. The reception, apparently, was highly favourable. One Frenchwoman told *In Touch*: 'I felt I could see again for the first time in 24 years—landscapes, the expressions on people's faces, the gestures, it was wonderful.'

Not all films are suitable for AudioVision. August Coppola cites dance-action pictures, for example, and he is pondering the problems posed by erotic sequences where so much is left to the viewer's imagination that the commentator might find himself producing verbal pornography. The first complete movie to be equipped with an AudioVision commentary, and the only one so far to be presented publicly to audiences

in English, is Francis Coppola's *Tucker: The Man and His Dream*, and I was shown a demonstration sequence on cassette, first hearing the commentary on its own, then with the accompanying images.

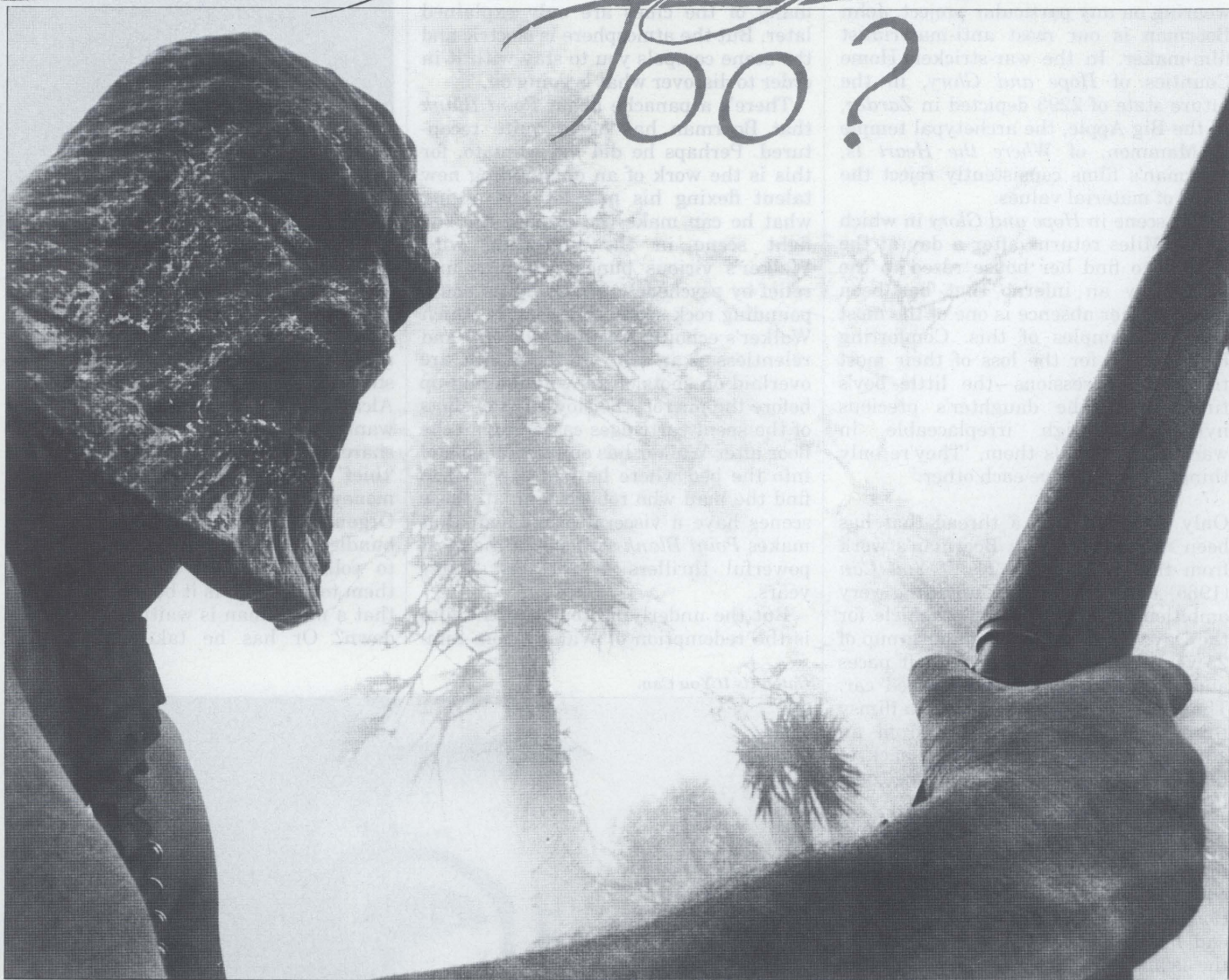
A fairly complex scene had been chosen, the one in which Tucker's revolutionary automobile is unveiled. There is constant cross-cutting between the upbeat, razzmatazz foreground where a restless audience is awaiting the arrival of the car and the anxious backstage events as the desperate team of engineers try to get the car ready. A male voice described the backstage activities, a female voice commented on what was happening out front. Once the division of labour was noted, there seemed little difficulty in distinguishing between them and the soundtrack. Technically, it was far superior to any simultaneous translation I've listened to in the cinema or the theatre.

I noted the way the backstage describer got across the sinister meeting between an agent of the Detroit motor manufacturers and their informant within the Tucker organisation by saying 'a stranger in a dark suit approaches a gaunt, hollow-cheeked security guard.' He seemed to me to reproduce in words the quality of Coppola's mise en scène. Whispering in the ear of a blind friend, I would have been less objective. My interrogator on *In Touch* raised a question that had not struck me—the colour of Tucker's car. The commentary said it was bright, shiny red. That seemed like an objective description. But to listeners blind from birth, who have been taught what colours convey, denote and connote to the populace at large, red has a precise series of meanings connected with danger, optimism, aggression, and sensuality.

My principal creative contribution on becoming acquainted with August Coppola's exciting experiment was to suggest that there might be two channels available to the unsighted viewer. Either could be chosen according to taste or whether he was completely or only partially blind. The first would provide the simple, objective description of events of the sort used in Paris for *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* and in the United States for *Tucker*. The second would be a slightly more sophisticated and probably less objective commentary that (presupposing the listener's knowledge of the basic language of film) could provide information about lighting, camera movement, framing, pace of cutting and so on, an account of the film's dynamics.

Just thinking about these questions after my brief contribution to *In Touch* has sharpened and clarified my ideas about how, and to what, I respond in the cinema. The task now, August Coppola says, is to persuade exhibitors, distributors and film-makers to cater for the unsighted. As he told *In Touch*, 'there are fifteen million blind people out there—like another country we have discovered.'

-is GOD in - SHOWBUSINESS Too?



Zardoz

THE FIRST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF JOHN BOORMAN, OUR MOST ANTI-MATERIALIST DIRECTOR

I am Arthur Frayn and I am Zardoz . . . I present now my story, full of mystery and intrigue, rich in irony and most satirical. In this tale I am a fake god by occupation. And a magician by inclination. Merlin is my hero. I am the puppet master. I manipulate many of the characters and events you will see. But I am invented, too, for your entertainment and amusement. And you, poor creatures, who conjured you out of the clay? Is God in showbusiness, too?

The pawky humour of this first scene from John Boorman's science-fiction epic *Zardoz* is characteristic. Unlike any other contemporary British director, Boorman reaches out beyond realism and plugs in to myth and magic. But he is a mystic with a funny-bone. Except, perhaps, in *Exorcist II: The Heretic*, he never loses sight of real people, with all their frailties, foolishness and idiosyncrasies. It's his safety valve for keeping pretension and pomposity at bay. Even at his most grandiose and consciously Wagnerian in a film like *Excalibur*, Boorman lightens the mood with levity. Nicol William-

son's fruitily Cornish Merlin brings the whole elaborate pageant down to human terms.

On the face of it, there seem to be two John Boormans. There's an epic one who belongs to that tradition in art from which Wagner, Thomas Malory, Bérour and, in our own times, Tolkien sprang. This side of him is reflected in *Excalibur*, *Zardoz*, *The Emerald Forest* and *Exorcist II*—films that touch on broad, weighty themes with a bearing on the future of mankind. But there's also a much more intimate John Boorman, who zeroes in on small pockets of humanity. *Hope and Glory*, his

autobiographical film, is of this kind. So are *Leo the Last*, *Catch Us If You Can* and his newest work, *Where the Heart Is*.

The three Hollywood films, *Point Blank*, *Deliverance* and *Hell in the Pacific*, fall somewhere in between. They are small-scale genre studies that seem to break right out of the mould and acquire a resonance which they might not have had in other hands. But are these strands distinct? Or are they just two aspects of the same personality? After all, Graham Greene's entertainments come from the same lode as the works he prefers to dignify as novels.

Whichever hat he happens to be wearing on any particular project, John Boorman is our most anti-materialist film-maker. In the war-stricken Home Counties of *Hope and Glory*, in the future state of 2293 depicted in *Zardoz*, in the Big Apple, the archetypal temple of Mammon, of *Where the Heart Is*, Boorman's films consistently reject the creed of material values.

The scene in *Hope and Glory* in which Sarah Miles returns after a day at the seaside to find her house razed to the ground by an inferno that has been raging in her absence is one of the most moving examples of this. Comforting her children for the loss of their most treasured possessions—the little boy's tin soldiers, the daughter's precious nylons, well-nigh irreplaceable in wartime—she tells them, 'They're only things. We still have each other.'

Only things. That's a thread that has been running through Boorman's work from the start. *Catch Us If You Can* (1965) doesn't aspire to anything very ambitious. Essentially it's a vehicle for the Dave Clark Five, a popular group of 25 years ago, to go through their paces and take to the road in a 'borrowed' car. The plot is almost non-existent, a flimsy thing about playing hookey from an advertising 'shoot' and getting back to nature on a deserted island off the coast in the West country.

One cannot pretend that the film is of any consequence, but coming back to it in the light of Boorman's later work, one is struck by its unfashionable rejection of swinging-sixties values. At the end our heroes are disillusioned with the island (which proves at low tide to be only a peninsula after all), with the admen, who are concerned only with publicity stunts, and with the girl who first led them there but who succumbs in the end to the blandishments of a fat contract and the promise of luxury. And the film ends with Dave and his band walking away from it all—a very different response to contemporary values from the one reflected at that time in, say, the films of Richard Lester.

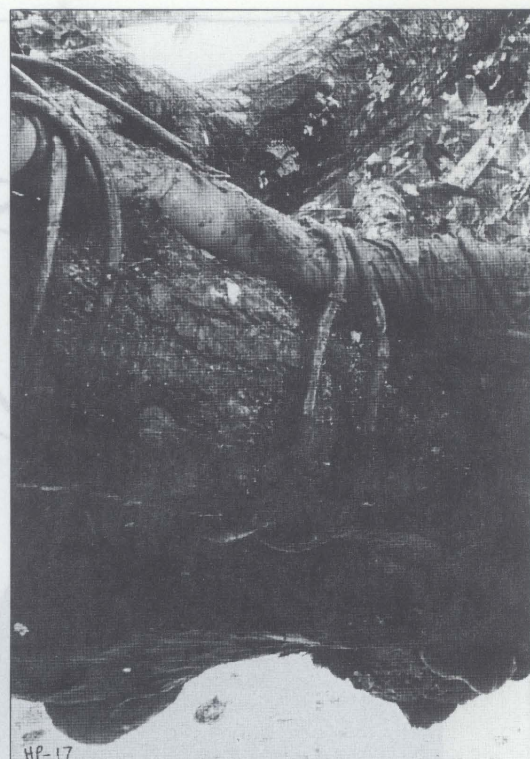
Point Blank (1967), John Boorman's second film and made as a Hollywood mainstream thriller for MGM, feels quite different from *Catch Us If You Can*. Camerawork, editing, acting are in a higher league. The story—of one petty hoodlum's attempt to track down and recover money that has been stolen

from him after a heist—is told in an elaborate, allusive way plainly influenced by the early Alain Resnais. Boorman intercuts scenes from widely different points in time to build up a mosaic effect in which the narrative finally jells only when all the pieces have clicked into place.

The opening scene in particular, with shots taken in the deserted Alcatraz, which we do not then know is no longer a prison, spliced with others showing how Lee Marvin's taciturn 'Walker' came to be there, is a little masterpiece of indirect story-telling. Nobody seeing the film for the first time can fully understand what is happening, since many of the clues are only explained later. But the atmosphere is electric and the scene compels you to stay with it in order to discover what is going on.

There's a panache about *Point Blank* that Boorman has never quite recaptured. Perhaps he did not want to, for this is the work of an outstanding new talent flexing his muscles and seeing what he can make the camera do. The fight scene in the nightclub, with Walker's vicious punches thrown into relief by psychedelic strobe lights and a pounding rock score; the scene in which Walker's echoing footsteps, forceful and relentless as an army on the march, are overlaid on shots of his wife making-up before the mirror; the slow-motion shots of the spent cartridges cascading on the floor after Walker has emptied his pistol into the bed where he had expected to find the man who robbed him: all these scenes have a visceral excitement that makes *Point Blank* still one of the most powerful thrillers of the last thirty years.

But the underlying theme of the film is the redemption of Walker from him-



Hell in the Pacific; Lee Marvin.

self. What motivates him is only partly a desire for revenge on the man who stole his wife and left him for dead in an Alcatraz cell. More than that, Walker wants his money back—his \$93,000 share of a robbery. Even when the 'thief' is dead, Walker still pursues the money higher up the chain of the Organisation. Yet in the end, with the bundles of crisp notes waiting for him to collect, he pulls back and leaves them to the Mob. Is it because he knows that a marksman is waiting to gun him down? Or has he taken aboard his

Catch Us If You Can.





sister-in-law's judgment that something in him died in Alcatraz? Boorman never spells it out but we can draw our own conclusions. Would the money have bought him happiness after his wife's suicide? No—only things.

Hell in the Pacific (1968), which Boorman also made with Lee Marvin, is complementary to *Point Blank*. Though Marvin and Toshiro Mifune, as wartime enemies stranded on a deserted Pacific island, have no luxuries to fight over, flotsam and jetsam become symbols of material possessions. 'That's my log,'

growls Marvin as he wrests from Mifune's grasp as sorry a bit of water-logged timber as one could ever expect to see.

Boorman shoots the film to emphasise the ritual quality of the conflict. In their first encounter he films alternative versions of the outcome, with the two men squaring up in formal poses on either side of the 'Scope screen, each killing the other in his own mind. But in no time their enmity has degenerated into a petty squabble over which man has got the most water.

It's a film of sharp irony that makes light of the notion of conqueror and conquered. First Mifune is in the ascendancy, lashing Marvin to a broken-off tree stump and making him drag it the length of the beach; then the tables are turned and in a trice Marvin is forcing Mifune to do the same. But at the same time Marvin has to cook for and feed Mifune. So who is the servant of whom?

Hell in the Pacific, as released, is not finally the film Boorman intended. The last scene is truncated and a stock shot has been added to suggest that both men are blown to pieces by a stray bomb. But Boorman's original ending survives, has been shown on BBC and marks the film as a far more optimistic work than was at first supposed. Having sailed on a makeshift raft to another island, the men discover an abandoned military position and artefacts of civilisation—copies of *Life* magazine and a welcome bottle of hooch. They drink themselves into a dim, distorted recollection of what their countries have been fighting about.

Neither can understand the other, but the tone of Marvin's question, 'How come you guys don't believe in God?' is enough to sour the moment. They grunt

and they puff and psych themselves up to do battle again. At which point the studio 'bomb scene' wraps the picture up. Boorman's version showed them recognising the absurdity of raking over old coals and tacitly agreeing to go their own ways.

The irony, of course, is that Marvin, the pragmatist, the simple man of action, could not see when his adversary was expressing a spiritual thought. For what does Mifune do on the beach but turn the sand into one of those immaculate patterns of lines and rocks that grace the courtyards of Japanese temples? Everything in nothing; while Marvin, with his faith in Yankee prowess and obsession with the notion of ownership, finds nothing in everything.

This notion is picked up in *Deliverance* (1972), the story of four city slickers who cast off the trappings of success and pit themselves against the rapids of a river in the Deep South that is about to be dammed out of existence in the interests of progress. As Lewis, who seems to be the toughest of the bunch, says: 'Sometimes you have to lose yourself before you can find anything.'

Deliverance was a pivotal film in Boorman's career. It summed up the disenchantment with the macho mystique already to be seen in *Point Blank* and *Hell in the Pacific* and it looked forward to the ecological concerns of *The Emerald Forest* and to the hypnotic shot of a hand rising from the lake that is the key image of *Excalibur*. This is Boorman at his most disturbing and poetic—a film-maker to haunt your dreams.

Of all his films, *Deliverance* is the most compact and direct—the very antithesis of a baroque piece like *Point Blank*. Cut or rearrange one shot, you feel, and the film would suffer. The poet James Dickey wrote the script (and plays the cameo role of the Sheriff of Ainty). He gives it the poetic overtones, the metaphorical flavour that make this, all in all, Boorman's most powerful work to date. Religion does not figure in the film at all—except in the title. Whether one chooses to look beyond the plot and to see the canoe trip as a symbol of the journey through life and of the spirit, blowing 'where it listeth', that can deliver salvation at the end of the day is up to the individual viewer. *Deliverance* works equally well on two levels.

By common consent, Boorman's weakest film is *Exorcist II* (1977), and it may be no coincidence that this is the one which tackles religion head on. It lacks the crude shock effects of William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* and commercially this was the film's undoing. Audiences who had expected more disgusting horror felt cheated, stayed away and told their friends to do so, too. Warner Bros panicked and experimented with a new ending; what now goes by the title *Exorcist II: The Heretic* is in some ways only a shadow of what Boorman intended.

Few in the audience, for example, will

Point Blank: Lee Marvin.





Burt Reynolds and Jon Voight in *Deliverance*.
Excalibur: 'The gold mask in which Mordred rides into battle ...'

pick up who 'the heretic' is and why he should be considered such. In William Goodhart's script Richard Burton's troubled Jesuit toys with many of the ideas about the origins of spirituality peculiar to Teilhard de Chardin, but he fails to spell them out. Is he the heretic or the character played by Max von Sydow, whose ideas they are said in the film to have been? The ambiguity is damaging. The notion that belief in God may evolve from belief in the Devil (in this case a giant African locust called Pazuzu) is approached only to be side-stepped. This is a film of religiosity more than religion.

Zardoz (1973), however, is the genuine article—a film about religion which faces up to the fact that much that passes for it is flim-flam. Zardoz himself, the great floating head of 2293, certainly is. He's a survivor of some nameless future catastrophe who re-invents himself as a deity in order to persuade an army of thugs to keep the

Vortex (a small band of the effete elite) safe from the brutals. Zardoz's name is a derivation of the Wizard of Oz who, in Frank L. Baum's story, was just such a charlatan. In Boorman's film he is Arthur Frayn, complete with a painted beard and moustache as phony as Groucho's.

Zardoz is one of only three scripts that Boorman has written substantially himself (the others are *Hope and Glory* and *Where the Heart Is*, credit for which is shared with his daughter Telsche). It's a shrewd portrait of a future society. Hedonism is the new god within the Vortex, while Zardoz is the fake god-head which the immortals use to keep the brutals at bay by spewing forth guns with which they can kill each other. Transgressions inside the Vortex (and that means having negative thoughts) are punishable only by ageing, never by death since that is no longer possible. Apathy, however, is invading all the Vortices like a sinister,

growing weed. Remove from people the possibility of getting better (or worse) and life begins to go into a tailspin.

Death, in Boorman's film, is 'a consummation devoutly to be wished' because it is what gives meaning to life. There's a wonderfully poetic image for this in the film's closing scene, where Zed, the erstwhile Exterminator, and Consuella, the former immortal, marry, beget, die and are reduced to skeletons. Boorman shoots it as a series of dissolves, with the couple seated against a rock. In the end they are dust yet something remains: their son has gone out into the world and on the rock behind them is the imprint of their palms. Man, it seems to be saying, was here and that is worth more than all your false gods.

Excalibur (1981) is the film that one side of John Boorman was born to make. In the words of another Boorman movie (*Hope and Glory*) it is the ultimate googly—the ball that looks like a leg-break but is really an off-break. *Excalibur* looks like a Hollywood blockbuster (like *Knights of the Round Table*) but is actually a European art movie (like *Lancelot du Lac*). *Excalibur* is an allegory, a story of two forces—the sword and the Eucharist, symbolised in the blade Excalibur and the Holy Grail. It's the tragedy of that most perfect society the company of the Round Table, brought low by the sin of pride and redeemed by the blood of Christ. The fable, naturally, is not Boorman's invention, but it found in him a sympathetic exponent.

Boorman's use of Wagner is inspired. The composer embraced the Arthurian legend only in *Parsifal*, from which Boorman does, indeed, draw, but the film also quotes from *Tristan und Isolde* to mirror the love of Lancelot and Guinevere and from *Götterdämmerung*. Using Siegfried's Funeral March to accompany the scenes in which Arthur draws the sword and in which, at the end, Perceval (Parsifal) returns it to the lake is equally telling.

Boorman's colour palette in this film is remarkable. The gold mask in which Mordred rides into battle seems to symbolise the false lure of materialism; the blood-red sun that casts its lurid rays over the destruction of Camelot seems to be passing judgment on an experiment that failed. As Lancelot says, 'They have made themselves gods and Christ has abandoned us.'

The Emerald Forest now seems even more relevant than it did when it was made five years ago. It is the quintessential 'green' film—a plea for ecological responsibility in the face of the commercial forces cutting swathes through the equatorial rain forest in the name of civilisation and progress. It's based on a true story, but the trigger—the abduction of a white boy by Amazonian Indians and a father's long search for him—yields to such wider issues as the preservation of native cultures and the salvation of the planet itself.

In western terms this is a pagan film. Christianity plays no part in it, but

religion does. Much of the film is set among an Indian tribe calling themselves the 'invisible' people because they merge into the jungle. And on screen they do, indeed, seem almost indistinguishable from their surroundings. To them we are the termite people because we tear down the trees and 'take the skin off the world'. The film's final statistics are a grim reminder of the cost of 'progress' and the exploitation of the world's resources. Only 120,000 Indians now live in the equatorial rain forest, compared with 4 million who did so when records were first compiled.

The intimate side of John Boorman is no recent development. *Catch Us If You Can* found him in this mood from the beginning. Some of his best work is to be encountered in this type of film. *Leo the Last* (1969) is a companion piece to *Where the Heart Is*. Both are set in rundown accommodation—in London and New York. In the former, Leo is an aristocrat who would rather watch birds with a telescope than human 'birds' from the North London town-house he has inherited with the death of his father. It is a rich, generous study of a cross-section of London more than twenty years ago that culminates in Leo setting fire to his property rather than allowing it to fall into the hands of wealthy hangers-on. A brilliant *pointilliste* piece that evokes the life of an entire neighbourhood, *Leo the Last* is the story of one man's conversion, against the odds, from a dilettante with a taste for ornithology into a friend of the poor.

Where the Heart Is almost feels like *Leo the Last* revisited. But it is more than that. It's the story of a last-ditch stand against the destruction of culture and beauty by the forces of commerce. Slap in the middle of New York stands an old relic of the days of New Amsterdam—a Dutch-style house which stands in the way of property development. Father (Dabney Coleman), incensed at the way his family conspires to prevent him knocking it down for redevelopment, makes it over to them and orders them to do with it what they can.

Soon they turn it into a co-operative, with room for everyone from a failed Wall Street futures dealer to a tramp who rejoices in the name of Shitty. Art flourishes in the form of the *trompe l'oeil* effects of Coleman's artist daughter; and at the end Coleman himself, now ruined on Wall Street, comes to recognise that there is more to life than price/earnings ratios.

In one sense the film feels like *You Can't Take It With You*. Like Capra's film, Boorman's is rich in eccentrics living on the fringes of society. But unlike Lionel Barrymore and his brood, who 'toil not, neither do they spin', this family sets about creating an alternative society in the very heart of New York. What Boorman and daughter Telsche are saying is that there is another world out there—and not



Where the Heart Is: Suzy Amis and Una Thurman.

Hope and Glory: after the air-raid. 'They're only things...'

necessarily a political one—that has other values than cash-flow projections and the bottom line.

It's a shame that *Where the Heart Is*—a four-word synonym for 'home'—is not a better film. But this time, it has to be said, Boorman has got the balance between caricature and emotion slightly wrong. Those who love Boorman's work are likely to prefer its predecessor. *Hope and Glory* (1987) remains his most optimistic work to date—a rich evocation of wartime Britain that captures the patriotism, the humour, the childlike sense of excitement at bombing, barrage balloons and shrapnel better than any other film. Anyone who lived through those days knows that Boorman has netted the truth. Here was a moment of glory, when a nation was one; there was no them and us; and all were united in a common cause.

Britons fought because they felt there were values worth defending—the right to play cricket, to be gallant to ladies, to

bowl a googly and not be executed for doing so. And somehow, something ensured that the good guys won. Whatever it was, it even worked through the Devil's disciples ('Thank you, Adolf' goes up the heartfelt cry as one of Hitler's bombs puts paid to school for the day).

The most glorious scene in this film happens almost by chance on the river. Mother's ration books have gone up in the fire that destroyed her home and it will be six weeks before she can get new ones. Ma and pa, living in the country, don't know how they can continue to feed them all. Then a Fokker flies overhead, a fugitive from some dog-fight over London. It drops its spare bombs and suddenly half the fish in the river are killed stone dead. Young John Boorman and his family, for that effectively is who they are, will live very well that week. 'It's a miracle,' his aunt exclaims. 'It's like the feeding of the five thousand.' Many a true word...

First the hats. Two broad-brimmed fedoras, one white with a thick black band, well-worn but presentable, the other immaculately yellow, impervious to dust and bullets. This particular hat, whatever the colour, suits Warren Beatty's long face. Film stars, particularly cowboy stars, who can wear hats comfortably have nothing to fear. Humphrey Bogart was always at ease in a hat, whether Sam Spade's trilby or Charlie Allnut's greasy stoker's cap; and Steve Martin, at the other extreme, was marvellous as one of the Three Amigos chiefly because he was unfazed by a ludicrous black sombrero heavily decorated with silver.

Clyde Barrow, the flesh-and-blood law-breaker, and Dick Tracy, the comic-strip law-enforcer, are both 1930s hat men. The first time we see Clyde, he doffs his hat to Bonnie Parker in mock apology for trying to steal her mother's car. The credits of *Dick Tracy* show a hand reverently reaching for a badge, a radio-receiver watch and that pristine hat. Clyde's hat, though, is more than an adornment—a no-hoper's stab at a dash of style—it's also something of a bandoleer. On a street in East Dallas, Bonnie lazily dares Clyde to prove himself. He is wagging a long, self-striking match between his gleaming teeth: then our attention is drawn to the three

BLACK HAT

● JOHN PYM ON THE SPACE BETWEEN

other matches nestling like rifle bullets in his hatband. Clyde wasn't in the end saved by his hat; though Dick perhaps was...

Stray thoughts on a July afternoon in Cambridge, Massachusetts, watching *Dick Tracy* in the same cinema where I saw *Bonnie and Clyde* twenty-three years ago. A sense of occasion then filled the full house, as Arthur Penn's shockingly violent fairytale opened with the click-click of an old glass-plate projector. A succession of sepia photographs of Bonnie and Clyde when young are intercut with the stars' names which slowly stain from yellow to red. During the over-orchestrated front titles of *Dick Tracy*, again yellow and red, two unruly boys were already

chasing each other down the aisles and no one, least of all their mother, felt moved to cuff them silent.

Warner Bros, the home of gangsters, backed both pictures. *Bonnie and Clyde* opened and earned a reputation; *Dick Tracy*, however, had a reputation pushed before it. The first made a name for Faye Dunaway; the second was predicated, it seems, on the star performance and wardrobe of the singer and sometime film actress Madonna. Clyde, his manhood restored, is in the end Bonnie's equal. Straight-arrow Dick, however, is really no match for Madonna's vampish Breathless Mahoney. Bonnie and Breathless are old-fashioned molls (Jean Harlow could have played either), but both also tellingly reflect their times: the tragic what-have-I-got-to-lose insouciance of the late 60s, the self-consciously stylish amorality of the late 80s.

The two films share three actors. And how they are used also says something about how the world in the movies has shifted over the last twenty years. *Bonnie and Clyde* has five principals, including three secondary leads, Michael J. Pollard (the mechanic C. W. Moss) and Gene Hackman and Estelle Parsons (Clyde's brother Buck and his noisy wife Blanche). The latter are quirky, rounded characters, more memorable in most respects than Beatty and Dunaway, who in retrospect often appear to be acting against rather than with each other. The supporting players, too, Dub Taylor as C. W.'s irate father, Gene Wilder the kidnapped undertaker and Denver Pyle the taciturn, vengeful lawman, possess a vivid freshness which came (and still comes) straight off the screen.

Dick Tracy, on the other hand, aside from its stars and three secondaries (Al Pacino, the chief mobster, Glenn Headly, Dick's regular girl, and the boy who plays 'The Kid'), has an alphabetical castlist of star cameos as long as your arm. Several of these players, however, are so excessively made-up that one has to take their presence largely on trust. Others, such as police chief Charles Durning and District Attorney Dick Van Dyke, are pennyplain ciphers. While others—James Caan's gang boss, for instance, mumbling and looking down his nose—are assigned the self-indulgent task of aping other actors. Tucked away among this throng are two tiny roles: Michael J. Pollard, as an eavesdropper who narrowly escapes a cement coffin, and

Bonnie and Clyde: Faye Dunaway, Warren Beatty.



YELLOW HAT

'BONNIE & CLYDE' AND 'DICK TRACY' ●

Estelle Parsons, the mother to whom Dick's girl Tess Trueheart briefly returns.

Michael J. Pollard has never been better than as C.W. (close your eyes and you can hear those two initials): impish, squash-faced, a goofy mascot, but a singular one. One would indeed be hard-pressed to think of a more representative hippy icon. Estelle Parsons, a distinguished New York stage actress, played Blanche Barrow as a respectable woman caught up in horrifying illegality, who deals with it, between the hysterics, by pretending she is somewhere else. These performances gave *Bonnie and Clyde* its true weight. Without them, I suspect, one would have been less taken with the somewhat mannered stars. In *Dick Tracy*, though, their performances hardly register: Estelle Parsons could be any understanding mother from D. W. Griffith on; while Michael J. Pollard's face, even in the half-light, seems to have lost its arresting abnormality.

Warren Beatty's face, on the other hand, seems weathered but fundamentally unchanged. The smile is still taking, and that boyish confusion he displays when trying to explain himself to women who find him irresistible but exasperating is still a marketable asset. In *Bonnie and Clyde*, an outdoors picture full of cars weaving down dusty country roads in a broad landscape, he was lightly clad, loose-limbed and athletic. A match between his teeth didn't seem an affectation.

In *Dick Tracy*, however, the hero is swaddled for most of the movie not only in a bulky trenchcoat, but also in hat, collar, tie and suit. Sometimes one's chief impression of Beatty is of an immobile face staring out of a yellow frame. To be sure, he is still athletic. Indeed, much is made of his ability to sprint (in long-shot) in full regalia; and he can still throw knock-out punches and catapult through skylights with the ease of a twenty-year-old. Whereas *Bonnie and Clyde* had a curiously careless ease, even in some of its bloodiest moments, which heightened its affecting poignance, *Dick Tracy* is an oppressively airless nighttime fantasy clotted with deliberately self-conscious artifice.

Sentimentality often of a particularly sticky kind was in vogue in the 60s. But David Newman and Robert Benton's script of *Bonnie and Clyde* had the good sense to undercut the film's most potentially glutinous sequence, the gang's picnic on the sand-dunes with Bonnie's

family, by making the sceptical, slow-drawl mother a striking counterpoint to Burnett Guffey's lyrical slow-motion images of the good-hearted thieves laying on a banquet for the deserving poor. In the 80s, sentimentality comes in a different wrapping. The ingredients are familiar: the tough undernourished orphaned Kid befriended by Tracy; the sorely tried Tess who must bite her lip when, ice-cream cone in hand, she catches a flustered Dick straightening himself out after an all-out assault by Breathless. What's different here, perhaps, is the shying away from the spontaneous. One hesitates to write the shying away from the expression of true feeling, but that is what it is.

Bonnie and Clyde is peppered with violence. A storekeeper rears out of nowhere and lays about the bemused Clyde with a cleaver. A man perched on the running-board of a getaway car is shot in the eye through the car window in a subliminal reminder of the famous shot in *Battleship Potemkin*. Then there is the brilliant, heart-pounding sequence when the gang breaks out of an encircled hideaway at night in a fusillade of gunfire and squeals off with the blinded, screaming Blanche in the back of one of the cars.

If this were not enough, the scene is immediately topped by a second, equally bloody skirmish in a field the next morning from which C.W., Clyde and

Bonnie only narrowly escape. This is the film's climax. What happens next, the fugitives' recuperation with C.W.'s father who browbeats his son into betraying his friends, is inevitable; and the lyrical denouement with Bonnie and Clyde shot to pieces outside the town of Arcadia, Louisiana, comes at least partly as a release both for them and for us.

Bonnie and Clyde is as soaked in violence as the lettering of the opening credits. The violence of *Dick Tracy* is only slightly less pervasive. But this is 'Toontown' violence: and the picture has been released with a Roger Rabbit short in which Baby Herman leads his luckless keeper through an amusing briar-patch of tortures. The villains of *Dick Tracy* are a grotesquely pug-ugly bunch—Flattop, the Rodent, Lips Manlis—of the sort who once upon a time were reckoned to give delicate children nightmares. They are rubbed out with relish and with no second thoughts. Bonnie and Clyde shot and maimed their way through the South without a second thought, too. But in their case, one wondered just why they were so heartless.

The climax of *Dick Tracy* is a hugely noisy battle between the forces of good and evil. Dick blasts away with his submachine gun while all around cars crash and explode, and although there is not a great deal of visible bloodshed, there is at least one dangling arm to indicate that a few at least of the bullets hit home. This scene was caught by a television crew videoing a programme on the making of the feature film. At one point, a car behind Beatty flips into the air, disintegrates and falls dangerously close to the star-director. He keeps firing with commendable sang froid. The crew held its breath. Interviewed afterwards, Beatty cheerfully confessed he had been unaware of the danger. The set was so noisy that he had worn earplugs and had been unable to hear a thing. ■

Dick Tracy: Glenn Headly, Warren Beatty.



men at work

JILL FORBES DISCOVERS THE FILMS OF LUC MOULLET

Anyone who lived in France in the early 1970s will have watched with a combination of wonder and despair as the country dragged itself into the technological era. Take the telephone system. In 1970 you could wait five years to get a domestic telephone installed, hence the quaint practices of sending *pneumatiques* and conducting social life from the local café. Then, by presidential fiat, the telephone system was updated, but because the decree came like a bolt from the blue it was several years before technology caught up with political will. Call boxes were retooled five times before a moderately vandal-proof model was arrived at, to the confusion of elderly punters who thought they understood how the boxes worked.

As with the phones, so with the Métro. The dreaded *poinçonneuses*, so called I always imagined by analogy with the *tricoteuses* of the Revolutionary tradition, since like their hideous

ancestors they whiled away the time when not punching tickets with their knitting, were phased out at the same time that the phones were modernised, and a system of automatic barriers was installed just like the one we are only now getting in London. But passengers jumped over them—or at least those that were athletic enough did—so something had to be done about the design.

At well-behaved suburban stations peopled by the law-abiding and middle-aged, you can still find examples of the original model, a simple steel bar set in a waist-high machine. At the better frequented but still essentially law-abiding stations, such as those serving the Opéra or the big department stores, you have the second version with a higher, opaque door. And at the really rough venues with downmarket shops, like Barbès or the République, you have the automatic-door-surrounded-by-floor-to-ceiling-perspex model so that, oh

frustration!, you can look through to the other side but you cannot touch. To reach which point it took the best part of a decade.

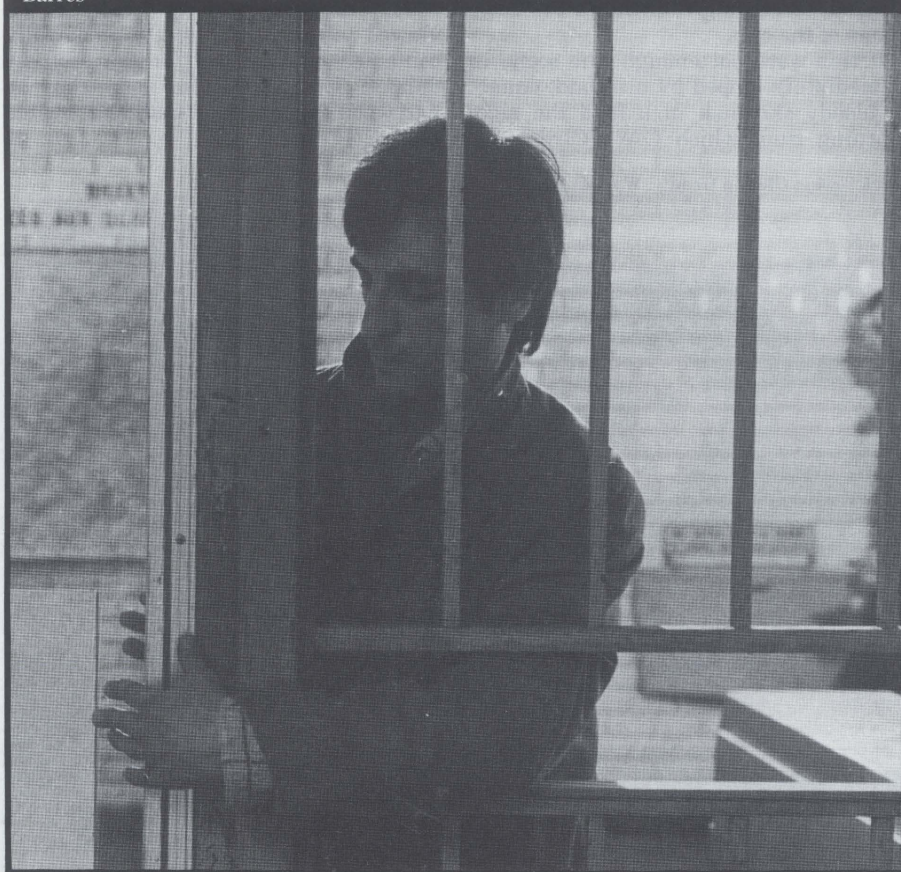
The first few minutes of Luc Moullet's brilliantly funny short film *Barres* (1984) charts this process in three sequences, showing how the station at the Quai de la Rapée acquired, at six-month intervals, or so the titles tell us, ever more hurdle-proof barriers. It then continues in spoof silent comedy manner, with three Métro inspectors lurking like Keystone cops in the tunnel ready to pounce on passengers without tickets, while the commentary, instead of being spoken voice-over, is written out in intertitles with pretty borders.

The film embroiders on the initial conceit, taking a mock-serious line on human creativity with a quotation from Pascal to the effect that 'the more obstacles there are, the more man wishes to overcome them'; suggesting, as an old lady holds open the door enabling a young man to enter from the exit side, that 'national solidarity exists among all classes of society'; pretending that jumping the barriers keeps down the rate of heart disease in Paris and finally stating that barrier-hurdling is France's main hope for an Olympic title.

Moullet also invents new ways of getting in without a ticket, such as lining up in threes, lying flat on a skateboard and sliding under the barrier, sabotaging the machine with oil and salt and, best of all, sticking chewing gum on the door on your way out so that it fails to shut properly and can be opened from the wrong side on your way in. 'Chewing gum, a high-tech industry,' comments the title. Then he pretends to investigate the history of barriers, going right back to the days of the turnstile, and takes a side-swipe at the ticket clerks who watch with perfect equanimity as passenger after passenger enters the Métro without paying: 'It's not my job.' I fully expect Moullet to be hired by London Underground to make training films.

Audiences in Britain could be forgiven for lack of familiarity with Luc Moullet, only one of whose films, *Un Steak trop Cuit*, made as long ago as 1960, has ever been distributed here. I am at a loss to explain why this should be, since although Moullet often chooses subjects

Barres



which are specific to France and although he is a cinephile of the kind that it is difficult to be outside France, his films are highly accessible and his humour is universally appealing. Another of his recent works, *Les Sièges de l'Alcazar*, helps to explain something of the director's history and does so in a wittily self-deprecating manner.

It would appear that the Alcazar, contrary perhaps to the expectations of those who thought that the title referred to the exploits of some obscure Spanish ancestor on Moullet's mother's side, was a cinema pulled down in 1963, one of those fleapits with hard seats (*sièges*) where the owner was the projectionist and his wife doubled (or tripled) as box-office clerk, usherette and ice-cream vendor. This was a hall which screened double bills, and so one inspired scene shows the very middle-aged and ugly wife hurriedly removing her usherette's overalls as the interval approaches, and fixing a ludicrous red bow in her lank grey hair before proceeding majestically down the centre aisle, between the virtually empty rows of seats, intoning, 'Demandez des Esquimos.' She is also shown retrieving ticket halves from the floor at the end of the evening and sticking them together with sellotape, for this typical small French business was not doing well.

Our hero and narrator, however, is employed as a critic on *Cahiers du Cinéma* (its distinctive yellow cover can be glimpsed poking out of his jacket pocket) and in his view the Alcazar had

the best film programmes in Paris. There he would repair to catch rare screenings of the works of Vittorio Cottafavi, author inter alia of *Hercules Conquers Atlantis*, on whom he was writing the definitive study. But being a film buff he liked to sit at the front of the cinema, in the rows known as the 'premières' which were cheaper than others mainly, or so the owner's wife said, so that the retail price index did not rise. There he had to compete with the children for whom they were largely intended as well as contending with the wife, who did not take kindly to an adult paying only the cheap rate.

High drama occurred at the Alcazar when our hero spotted in a seat towards the back of the auditorium a glamorous and famous woman, senior critic on *Cahiers du Cinéma's* great rival *Positif*. Wondering whether she, too, had discovered Cottafavi or whether she was simply keeping tabs on *Cahiers*, he feigned departure, via the gents, and returned to find her gone. And so the siege takes place, the critics pursue each other while pouring scorn on the rival objects of admiration ('Antonioni is just the poor man's Cottafavi') and deriding each other's politics (*Cahiers* is right wing, *Positif* more sympathetic to the PCF), until the book is published, the whole of the first two rows are filled with cinephiles, Cottafavi enters the public domain and the children complain that there are too many adults for them to see the screen.

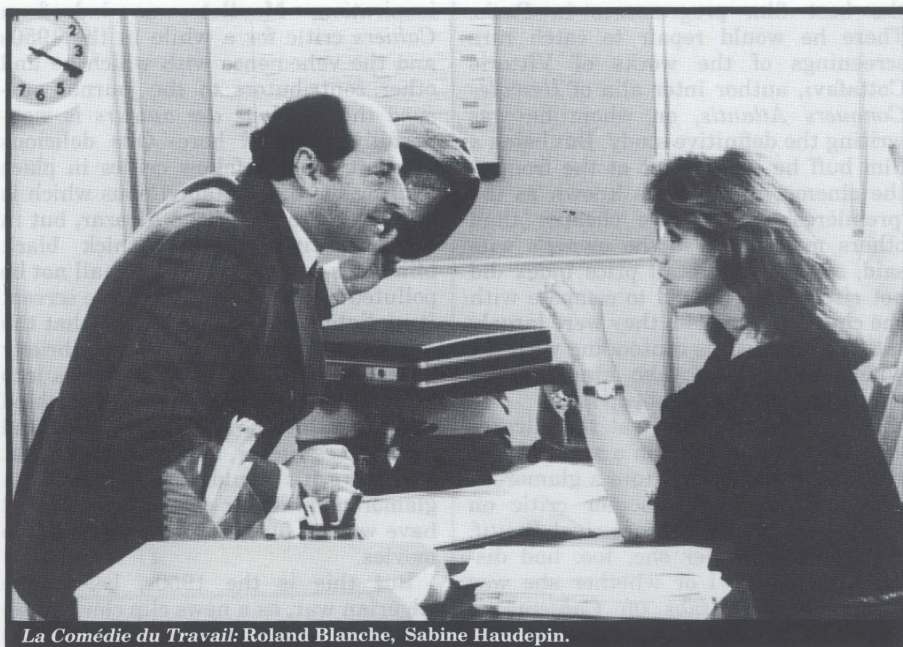
This film is partly autobiographical in

inspiration. Moullet was indeed a *Cahiers* critic for a while in the 1950s and the vehemence with which he and other contributors to the journal pursued the *politique des auteurs* is wonderfully parodied here. One delicious moment has his fellow critics in place waiting for the Cottafavi opus which is second on the bill at the Alcazar, but in the meantime sporting thick black blindfolds so that their gaze shall not be polluted by anything else on the screen. It is slightly difficult to believe that the somewhat unkempt Moullet, briefly glimpsed in *Barres* as he descends into the Métro, could ever have resembled the clean-shaven, hard-jawed, besuited hero of *Les Sièges*, any more than that *Positif's* critic would have looked like a glamorous film star or her friend would have worn a fur stole for a night at the movies.

But this is the 1950s, before the Algerian war, as a news clip cleverly reminds us. However, it is characteristic of Moullet to use his own life as material for films and to wish to blur the distinction, as the *Cahiers* critics did in their youthful enthusiasm, between life and films. In 1975, for example, he cast himself in *Anatomie d'un Rapport*, co-written with his partner Antonietta Pizzorno (is she the source, one wonders, of *Positif's* contemptuous put-down of *Cahiers'* pronunciation of Italian in *Les Sièges*?), a film in which the couple go through the actions of daily life, from shopping and eating to attempting to make love and failing.

Les Sièges de l'Alcazar.





La Comédie du Travail: Roland Blanche, Sabine Haudepin.

The presentation of the everyday and the realisation that everyday life is massively surreal occurs time and again in Moullet's films. Thus what Moullet shared with the other *Cahiers* critics who turned to film-making at about the same time or a little earlier than himself, along with a liking for obscure directors and a preference for minor film genres, was a kind of social realism new in French cinema at the time. His *Brigitte et Brigitte* (1966), for example, looks at the problems of students in Paris in a way that might be compared to Chabrol's *Les Cousins*, and is one of the innumerable films of the period devoted to 'young people' and their doings.

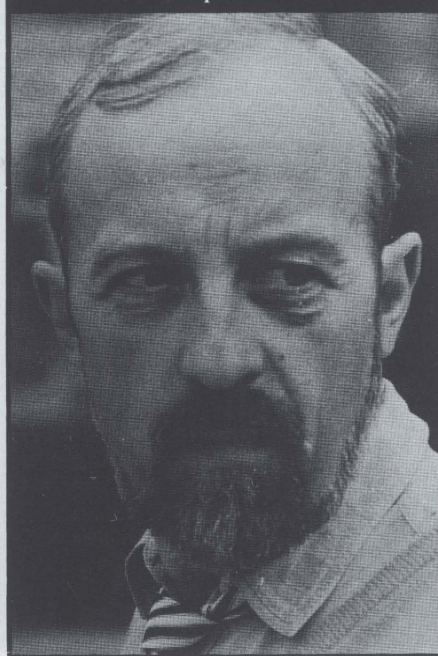
An even more pertinent comparison is to be made between the films of Jean Rouch and those of Moullet. The ethnographic techniques of *Chronique d'un Été* or Rouch's episode in *Paris vu par* are comparable to those adopted by Moullet, who in *Barres* or *Les Sièges de l'Alcazar* places his camera in a particular position of vantage and records what passes in front of it. In neither film, of course, is the position maintained. In *Barres* it is interrupted by the titles, in *Les Sièges* by the comings and goings in and out of the cinema, but the onlooker's slightly elevated position in both films adds to the humorous distance while lending the camera a sort of authorial presence through its ability to encompass a view. Real life then turns into fiction or drama and the displacements in the *Alcazar* seats turn into a sort of musical chairs, the kind of sketch that might be found in the café théâtre or the cabaret.

Another striking characteristic of Moullet's films is their poverty of means. He has adduced what he calls his 'humble origins', the fact that his family was poor and the habits acquired in childhood of making do with very little, to

explain his ability to invent with virtually nothing. He has also said that he tries to avoid prettification or 'gentrification' in the action and situation of his films and that economy and austerity are his watchwords.

This is certainly true of both *Barres* and *Les Sièges de l'Alcazar*, but it also infects his conceptualisation of cinema. Anything is a pretext for film with Moullet—a frugal meal in *Genèse d'un Repas*, the detail of his own life in *Anatomie d'un Rapport*, going in and out of the Métro. The things that other film-makers would elide are massively present in Moullet's films and his is the cinema of *bricolage*, taking bits and pieces of what is and transforming this material for new ends, a process which is turned to brilliant effect in his 1988 feature *La Comédie du Travail*.

Luc Moullet, here acting in a supermarket sequence.



It is in one way a much more elaborate film than most of Moullet's, since it involves a cast of several characters who chance to interact when they pass through the labour exchange. The tenacious and hardworking (as her name implies) Françoise Duru actually works in the department which helps place the unemployed in jobs. She encounters Benoît Constant who is, as his name suggests, a mild-mannered and slightly dim person employed as a bank clerk, promoted to the loans department with strict instructions to lend to no one and then made redundant because he does no work. Benoît is so ashamed at his predicament that he conceals it from his wife. He also attempts to chat up Françoise, an attempt which is not welcome.

Finally there is Sylvain Berg, lover, we will have guessed, of nature and of mountains, who signs on every month and draws benefits on the strength of forged pay slips (bought from a company specialising in such things), but uses his unemployment money to finance his climbing expeditions. The trouble starts when Françoise falls in love with Sylvain, just by looking at him queuing outside the exchange, and resolves to do him a favour. She is expert at finding jobs for unlikely customers and Sylvain will be no exception. She summons him for interview and accompanies him to his prospective employer Ducroq, who is about to take on the recently sacked Benoît. But when Françoise reminds him that he has fiddled his employer's social security contributions he agrees to take Sylvain instead.

The latter does everything he can not to get the job, including taking a copy of *Rouge* out of his pocket and reading it ostentatiously, but to no avail. As he and Françoise emerge from Ducroq's office she is attacked by some of her colleagues, who fear that her Stakhanovite work rate and fantastic success in placing the unemployed will soon put them all out of a job. However, Sylvain feels so sorry for her that he takes her home and they make love. Then he explains that the last thing he wants is a job.

At this point, as in most of Moullet's films, there is a shift of gear. Having extracted the maximum humour from a situation in everyday life, he now begins to indulge in fantasy. Thus Françoise goes climbing with Sylvain, collapses under the strain and is hospitalised, but tells Sylvain to go to Nepal without her. He, while hitching to Brussels airport, is picked up by Benoît, who is on his way to a secluded spot where he can write letters of application free from his wife's prying gaze.

Benoît recognises Sylvain as the man who stole the job he wanted and got off with Françoise and kills him. When sentenced to twenty years in prison he refuses to appeal, on the grounds that he knows he is now safe from

job-hunting. Françoise, meanwhile, has seen the error of her Stakhanovite ways and takes to filling out false pay slips in honour of Sylvain's memory, thereby ensuring that all her colleagues in the labour exchange will remain in employment.

This is obviously a comedy about *not* working, the moral of which, if it has one, might be 'let sleeping dogs lie'. But there is something of the framebreaker in Moullet, whose sympathies here, as elsewhere, are with those who beat the system by making it work for them. The tongue-in-cheek reference to Pascal in *Barres* is equally applicable to *La Comédie du Travail*. For Sylvain could not be described as lazy since he is constantly setting himself enormous obstacles to overcome. There is, we are given to understand, immense creativity involved in not working.

Take the example of the old man Sylvain meets on the train when they are both returning to Paris to sign on, whom he next encounters in the labour exchange but does not recognise because the old man has completely transformed his appearance in order to look like the identity-card photo of the friend on whose behalf he is there. This is the kind of ingenuity which Moullet celebrates in *Barres* and which, indeed, characterises his own films. Few people

could make, as he did, a film from a couple of eggs, some tuna fish and a banana, yet that is the basis of *Genèse d'un Repas*.

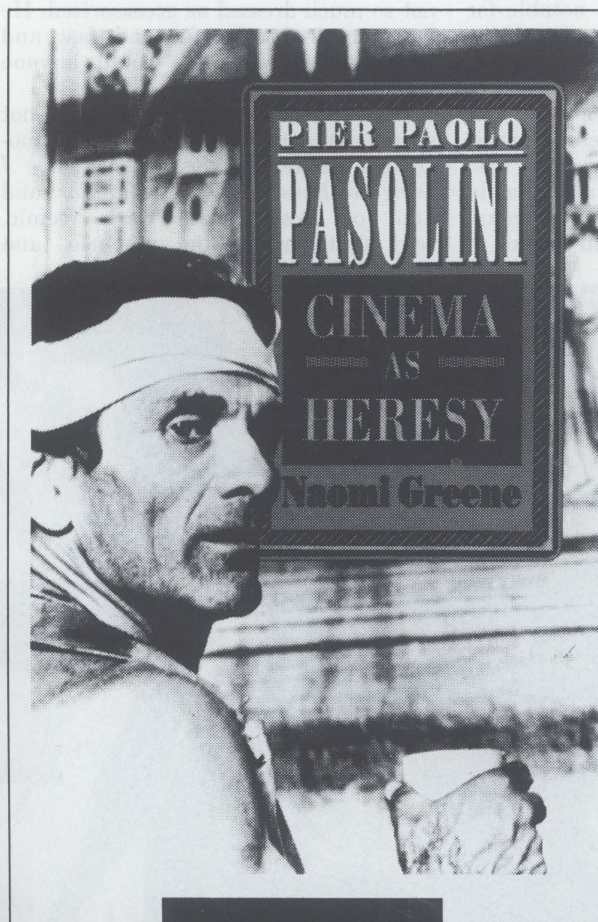
The intellectual side of Moullet delights in pushing situations to their logical conclusions, such as Benoît following his bosses' instructions so closely that he does himself out of a job; or in taking things back to first principles, such as investigating where the food on our tables actually comes from and discovering that the tuna from Brittany is canned there but caught, in appalling conditions, off the African coast. However, Moullet's visual imagination always sees the camera's gaze as eroticising the objects it lights on.

There could be no clearer illustration than Françoise secretly gazing down from the first floor of the labour exchange at Sylvain in the queue below. Not only is he the object of her desire, but perhaps so too is the rest of the film. And perhaps the glamorous and sexy *Positif* critic in *Les Sièges de l'Alcazar* is also a figment of the film-maker's imagination and all those comings and goings merely a cinematic dream. Even at the end of *Anatomie d'un Rapport*, after Moullet has apparently acted himself in his own film, his partner is heard disagreeing with the way he has done it (a stormy relationship, clearly) so that

this almost embarrassingly prosaic exercise, or so we thought, turns out to be an aborted fantasy as well. For Moullet the 'what if' children love to indulge in always turns into a movie.

So 'what if' we were lucky enough to be able to see all his eighteen films? We would encounter a mixture of Monty Python and Mike Leigh, grotesque realism and fantasy, but supported by a film culture that also made him author of one of the best books written on Fritz Lang and has led him to produce experimental works such as Marguerite Duras' *Nathalie Granger*. Moullet has the freshness of approach that is typical of autodidacts, which one also finds in the early films of Terence Davies and Bill Douglas, but without the rather grim view of life that, I suspect, appeals to those in charge of financing independent cinema in Britain because it makes them feel less guilty about their own privileges.

There's a lot of romantic love in Moullet, even if it is all in the gaze of the camera, and an enormous affection for the foibles of ordinary men and women. But above all, perhaps, his films have the compelling attraction of *mutatis mutandis* the open manhole: they expose how things work, they take things apart (*anatomie*) and put them together again (*d'un rapport*). ■



Pier Paolo Pasolini

Cinema as Heresy

Naomi Greene

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ALMODÓVAR

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BONDAGE

In the latest Pedro Almodóvar film, *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!*, the sexually charismatic Ricky (Antonio Banderas), recently released from a mental institution, follows former porn star and shakily recovering heroin addict Marina (Victoria Abril) home from the set of a 'second-rate horror film' she is making called *Midnight Phantom*. He takes her hostage in her own apartment, where indeed many of us end up getting taken hostage, and ties her up until she eventually and voluntarily submits to him.

When Marina finally pleads with him, '*Atame!*' (the Spanish title of the film), it is meant to be her emotional liberation and a moment of epiphany for us, the audience. One can only take the movie to mean that if someone decides to love us, we have no choice but to accept and submit to our romantic destiny. One can also, swiftly, reject such a paint-by-numbers psychosexual point of view, not to mention the rather ordinary film surrounding it.

What is extremely telling about *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* is a happily-ever-after coda in which Ricky, Marina and her sister Alma (Loles Leon) drive off into the sunset while a souped-up song of inspiration, 'I Will Survive', thrives, without any irony, on the soundtrack. The ending seems to bear no relation to the preceding action or what the characters, with the possible exception of poor Marina, have gone through. Clearly, this is the work of a director who has just gone through some sort of ordeal of his own.

Almodóvar has indeed survived. Following the international box-office and critical success of *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, he got his next film made. *Whew! There. Made it Through.* It was hardly a film that just had to be made. Taking a narrative idea that had already been brilliantly tilled by novelist John Fowles in *The Collector*, and well filmed by William Wyler in 1965 with Terence Stamp and Samantha Eggar, Almodóvar has nothing much to say. To be more accurate, he has nothing of much value or interest to say.

In America and parts of Europe, Almodóvar became the art-house

darling of the last decade. Before *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* opened in the United States, where it became a *cause célèbre* because of censorship problems, the *New York Times* Sunday magazine featured a Palm Sunday piece by novelist David Leavitt with everything but Almodóvar as Christ riding a donkey. 'From the Hitchcockian opening,' wrote Leavitt, 'to the Capraesque finale, the film never stops surprising, moving with fluid momentum toward a tear-jerker ending that verges on the comic but—at least the night I saw it—left most viewers in tears.'

Whatever his virtues might have been, and some of them are considerable, Almodóvar was in the right place at the right time. The 1980s were notable for the dearth of new and interesting directors as Hollywood moved more purposefully and deeper into corporate creativity—a period when a film was not really considered a success unless it had grossed over \$100m. Directors who once trod paths not often or easily travelled, such as Scorsese, Altman, Mazursky and Coppola, didn't seem to

want to follow them any longer—or be able to set out on them as often as they might like. In Europe, Bergman stopped making movies, Fellini was experiencing some sort of block and Buñuel and Fassbinder had gone to meet their rewards. The world was ready for saucy Pedro, or anyone with *cojones* for that matter.

Almodóvar's work, at its best, is quirky and insouciant, and he is steeped in the pop lore of the past, particularly the 1950s and early 60s, an era he adores. A gay sensibility, Almodóvar's is not one that is content merely to like or love; it must adore. Unapologetic, he brandishes a compulsion for both the dramatic and the detailed; Almodóvar's sets, clearly and unashamedly fake, are not so much dressed as accessorised. He is smart and colourful and fast and irreverent. What more could anyone want?

But loud colours and off-colour do not a cinematic phenomenon make. Almodóvar's earlier movies—*What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, *Matador* and *Law of Desire*—were dark, comic, sexy fantasies linking violence (and



ultimately death) with eroticism. They were fascinating at a time when sex and death, through AIDS, had become (and still are) inextricably connected. Titillating and deadpan, these films evoked death-sex anxieties and, dramatically, offered the audience a catharsis. Almodóvar had found a great new, forbidden subject—sex—which had otherwise been put to rest by society. He seemed as daring as one could possibly get. The breath of mischievously foul air in post-Franco Spain, the director was quickly embraced by the North American cognoscenti, who have a big soft spot in their collective heart for an underdog culture, especially if it also happens to be hot-blooded and relatively exotic. Essentially, Almodóvar was patronised all the way to stardom.

Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown, Almodóvar's brisk-moving, bright-as-a-penny farce, which is also airily sexy, allowed audiences worldwide a benign fantasy of sexual playfulness. Not only did Almodóvar come along at the right time, he also came bearing the bracing news that the *idea* of sex isn't so dangerous. Structured

like a classic farce, *Women* constantly reminds the audience, by tone and narrative exaggeration, that it's only a movie. In the Age of AIDS it was the kind of escapism even Hollywood would be hard put to match. (In fact, Hollywood has plans to remake it.)

A quick refresher course in its plot would go something like this: Pepa (Carmen Maura) has been dropped by womaniser Ivan (Fernando Guillen), a married man with whom she has carried on a lengthy affair. Ivan's mentally disturbed wife Lucia (Julietta Serrano) thinks that Pepa is going away with Ivan, and Pepa assumes that Ivan has gone back to Lucia. Ivan and Lucia's son Carlos (Antonio Banderas) comes to Pepa's apartment, coincidentally, with his fiancée (Rossy De Palma), to answer Pepa's rental ad, as does Pepa's distraught friend Candela (Maria Barranco), who has become romantically involved with Shiite terrorists who are going to hijack a flight to Stockholm.

In an effort to help her friend, Pepa goes to a feminist lawyer, Paulina Morales (Kiti Manver), who turns out to be the other woman Ivan has been seeing and who is going away with him on, of course, the flight to Stockholm. As expected, everyone except Ivan and his lawyer friend shows up at Pepa's apart-

ment, including two policemen who have traced Carlos' telephone call about the terrorists, and a repairman who has come to fix the phone Pepa had thrown through the window in a jealous rage. The demented Lucia holds everyone at gunpoint, before racing to the airport (commandeering a startled motorcyclist) to shoot Ivan and his lady love, with Pepa in hot pursuit.

Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown is actually pretty much a remake of Almodóvar's playful but puerile and otherwise forgettable *Labyrinth of Passion* (1982), which features such things as terrorism and a race to the airport and, like *Women*, is about nothing so much as itself. Without Almodóvar's style and highly developed sense of decor, the silly story of *Women* wouldn't amount to much. The subject of *Women* is, in fact, its own knowing tone and Almodóvar's ambivalent attitude, at once affectionate and condescending, towards pop culture's past. Even the credits refer back to the photographic work of Richard Avedon in 1957's *Funny Face*—a collage of women's faces, styles, hairdos and lipsticks accompanied by the wail of a Spanish torch song.

Almodóvar's is the comedy of too much. He squeezes as much bright, sassy colour as he can into every frame of film, although his compositional sense doesn't impact itself on the memory very much. (In *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* the use of colour—apricots, aquas, slutty blues, eye-opening yellows—is egregious; it tries to mask the fact that nothing much else is going on.) In *Women* Pepa goes through more costume changes than a vaudevillian, while Lucia wears a hat resembling a lampshade not in the best of taste. A peroxide blond cabbie (Almodóvar himself, bleached for the role), who shows up with deliberately ridiculous regularity whenever Pepa needs a taxi, has his car upholstered in leopard skin.

As a director, Almodóvar keeps you imprisoned at the surface and actors are dolls—Kens and Barbies—whom he loves to dress up. Except for Pepa, and this is perhaps due to Carmen Maura's abilities as both an actress and a personality, the characters in *Women* emerge as types, not people. Fair enough: *Women* is a farce. But the types lack any real autonomy of their own; the film, therefore, has no life outside the director's head and we, as the audience, aren't allowed to discover anything about its population for ourselves. Farce need not necessarily be fatuous.

In *Matador*, Almodóvar plays a harried, fussy clothes designer whom an interviewer asks if weddings are necessary. 'Yes,' he assures his interlocutor, 'otherwise there would be no wedding dresses.' As casual as this remark may appear, Almodóvar means business: his aesthetic is also purely surface-is-content. He's delighted in the way people present themselves to the world. They are what they wear. And in fact what one remembers from a film may be a colour, a dress, a stick of furniture, or

Far left: Victoria Abril in *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!*.
Left: *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*.
Bottom left: Carmen Maura in *Law of Desire*.
Below: Pedro Almodóvar.





Above: *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*. Right above: Carmen Maura. Right: *Dark Habits*.



an unusual face such as Rossy de Palma's toucan-like visage. One does not remember scenes: Almodóvar's movies feed on the caprice of their own moments.

This aesthetic is, I think, an unconscious outgrowth of the age of Warhol, where surface was emphasised at the expense of depth, and thinking became both pop- and self-referential. It's an aesthetic that tends to sneer at conventional methods of expression; in fact, it often rejects them out of hand. Almodóvar brandishes a 'cool' aesthetic, which is more about itself than its ostensible subject. His movies keep screaming 'Look at me! Look at me!' They are anti-establishment, anti-grown-up, anti-anything that gets in their way. In a word—juvenile. Wherein lies the charm and curse of his work.

The murder scenarios in *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, *Matador* and *Law of Desire*, which show the director's penchant for outlandish methods of dispatch (Maura kills her husband with a hambone in *What Have I Done . . . ?*; Assumpta Serna drives a stiletto into the hearts of the men she brings to orgasm in *Matador*) are simply a means to an end—the end of the movie. They're just not satisfying on a basic narrative level. Some effects, such as the use of prescience in both *Matador* and *What Have I Done . . . ?*, come from the bargain basement. Almodóvar is like a jokester who'll go to any extreme to get off a good crack, and he tends to turn shrill.

Women, despite its essentially frivolous nature, works best because one of its subjects is the shrillness of modern life. But Almodóvar doesn't know when to leave a good thing alone. There is a neat, funny scene where Ivan, a professional dubber like Pepa, dubs Sterling Hayden in *Johnny Guitar* while Joan Crawford (to whom Pepa bears a passing resemblance) mouths her words and emotes silently. The scene says something about the relationship between two characters, expressed cleverly in visual terms. But then Almodóvar has to go and make Pepa famous (around Madrid) for a commercial she's in as the mother of the 'Crossroads Killer' who gets her son's bloodied shirts clean with a detergent called *Ecce Homo*.

This is the stuff of revue and school-boy cleverness, which Almodóvar has never let go since the days of *Dark Habits*, sometimes called *Sisters of Night* (1983), an 'outrageous' black comedy in which nuns, with names like Sister Rat of the Sewers, Sister Manure and so on, trip on acid, snort coke and shoot up heroin. There's a crazy logic to the nuns' behaviour: to be worthy of receiving Christ, they must be sinners, and so they strip the convent bare to feed their habit. But it's a one-joke movie, relying almost completely on the audience's ill will toward religion, not exactly a skill-testing target.

Almodóvar is deliriously enamoured of illusion, both real and perceived. As dubbers, Pepa and Ivan provide illusion to Spanish movie audiences. Movie-

making is integral to the stories of both *Law of Desire* (the main character is a famous director) and *Tie Me Up!* (the hack director is also obsessed with exporno star Marina). And in *Law of Desire* the director's sister Tina (Carmen Maura) is a transsexual, which may be the ultimate illusion.

In *Women*, the terrace of Pepa's apartment, on which she keeps hens, ducks and rabbits, is deliberately made to look like a movie set. The backdrop for Madrid looks fake—*fabulously* fake. When Pepa goes to a pharmacy to get sleeping pills (drugs are part and parcel of every Almodóvar movie, it would seem), three women with mud packs on their faces poke their heads out like figures in a Warner Brothers 30s musical. Almodóvar's films aren't concerned with obscuring artifice as much as trying to uncover it at every turn. But the problem is that he wears his artifice on his sleeve.

Hence, precious little genuine emotion emerges in his films. When it does, it shows that Almodóvar has it in him to join the rest of the human race. 'Who'd think of giving a duck as a present?' Pepa fumes as she stuffs Ivan's belongings into a suitcase. It's a throwaway line, but it explains exactly why Ivan's leaving her has made her so desperate. It tells us why Ivan was so special to her. At the fashion show in *Matador* a disoriented middle-aged woman accidentally finds herself in the middle of the runway and, for a few seconds, does a little modelling turn, living out a hitherto inconceivable

fantasy. It comes out of nowhere and it's very funny, but very touching, too.

Of all his films, *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* is the director's most humane. Perhaps there is a connection between Almodóvar's own background and the lower-class milieu of the film. The mother (Carmen Maura) literally gets on her back to make money. A child becomes a male prostitute. Kids do and deal drugs. The grandmother brings home a pet lizard she christens 'Money'. The mother allows a lascivious dentist to adopt her child. It's all a little outré, yet there's a strong emotional undercurrent to the film, and a sense of life being lived rather than directed through a bullhorn. And the life of the poor isn't so much different from Almodóvar's hyperboles. (The grandmother locking up her cupcakes and mineral water, for example, is no different from the paranoid hoarding instinct many old people develop.)

Almodóvar has a genuine talent for the unexpected and the incidental. His films are dense and layered, and the logical and the absurd perform a weird little minuet in them. Pepa grabs a disk of a torch song (*their* song) off the turntable and hurls it, frisbee-style, out of the window and—wouldn't you know it?—it proceeds in slow motion across the street and beans the startled feminist lawyer/other woman, who has arrived to pick up Ivan's suitcase. We know where that disk is headed the

minute Pepa rips it from the turntable; and not only that, we'd be disappointed if it were otherwise. (Almodóvar's sensibility is not precisely camp; it occupies another, ticklish world somewhere between camp and kitsch—deconstructivist, post-modern and, yes, entirely fond of itself.)

Almodóvar dresses his Dietrich, Carmen Maura, mostly in red in *Women* and she has a red telephone that could glow in the dark. The director worked at the Spanish National Telephone Company for ten years and the much mangled instrument in *Women* appears to be his revenge. The plot, too, revolves around the phone and is a zippy variation on Cocteau's telephone monodrama, *La Voix humaine*. (Tina, in *Law of Desire*, gets her big break as an actress playing the Cocteau piece.)

Carmen Maura is a dream leading lady. Her bright brown eyes have a tired glamour and she is sexy in the most down-to-earth way imaginable. As Tina, the transsexual in *Law of Desire*, she was wild-spirited yet maternal; in *What Have I Done . . . ?* as the harried housewife Gloria, she was brilliantly ordinary. We miss her in *Tie Me Up!* the way we miss Dietrich in von Sternberg's *The King Steps Out*. Almodóvar has said rather cattily in interviews that Maura (they became estranged after *Women*) was too old for the part in *Tie Me Up!*, but Maura as an over-the-hill porno star would have enriched the

impoverished script. Her spirit of passion can often be the soul of Almodóvar's sometimes soulless work.

Dark sexual fantasy has long been Almodóvar's calling card, but after *Tie Me Up!* he might consider finding a new one. In *Matador* and *Law of Desire* the characters were interesting because their sexual urges were as hapless as they were obsessive. And the most refreshing element in Almodóvar's work in those pictures was that he didn't take sex too seriously. *Matador* ends with an extravagant double suicide in front of a flickering fire (inspired by the lovers having watched Gregory Peck and Jennifer Jones in *Duel in the Sun*). As the apprentice bullfighter in *Matador*, Antonio Banderas' attempts at raping a neighbour become a farce; the neighbour is more appalled by his pathetic clumsiness than his felonious intentions.

The lack of moralising and the anything-goes mood in those films were liberating. But in *Tie Me Up!* sex is a serious business for the *auteur*. It's a movie with a mission, out to make a point, and a fairly banal one at that. Schematic and essentially humourless, *Tie Me Up!* is not as layered as Almodóvar's earlier work has been. It is the product of a mind between engagements. One hopes it represents a period of gestation for his ideas and that some day we'll all learn what lies inside that big, black, kitschy heart. ■



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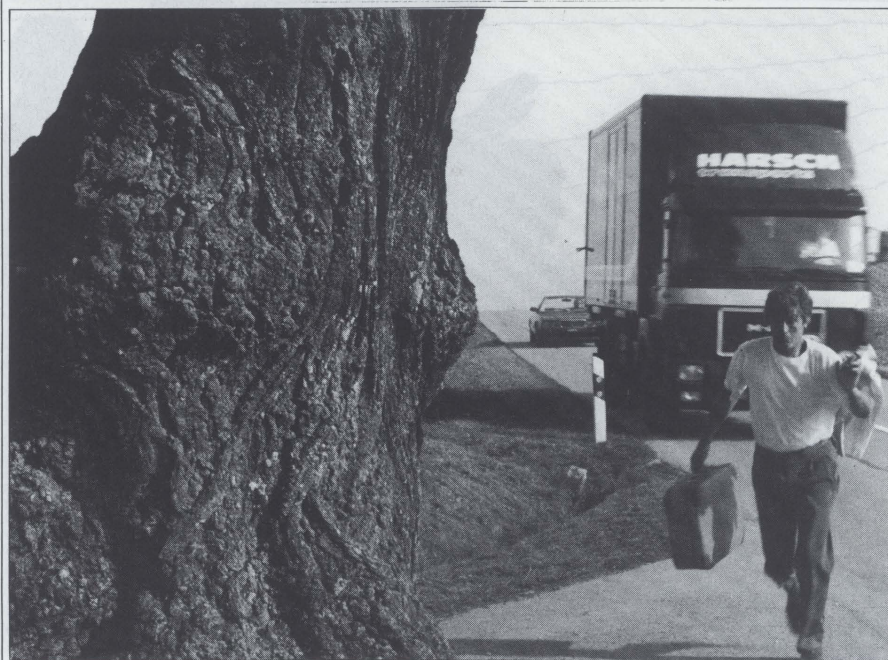
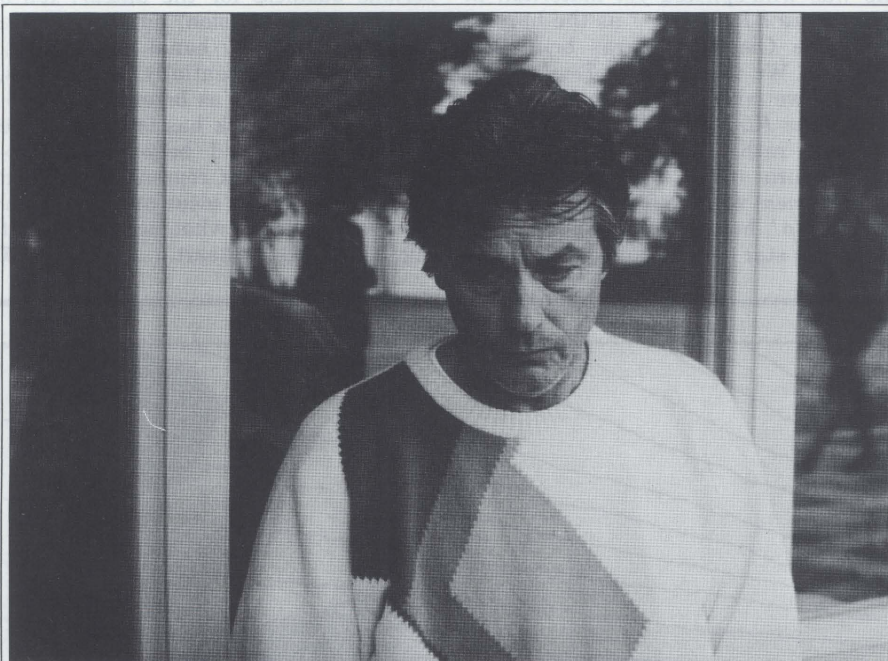
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GODARD'S NOUVELLE VAGUE

DOMINIC FACCINI ON AN 'AESTHETIC OF QUOTATION'



In an age when we are assailed by sameness, a Godard film can prove a most salutary experience. A breath of fresh air will wash over us. Ah, finally someone there to take chances. None the less, one should probably notify those unaccustomed to Godardian antics: this film is for the adventurous of spirit only.

The title may mislead many. Jean-Luc Godard, fabulous inventor of a new film aesthetic, has changed since the giddy optimism of the 1960s. This new New Wave no longer breaks on the azure of the Mediterranean as in *Pierrot le Fou*, nor are the heroes mad lovers and story inventors. This 90s wave has been constricted. The endless flow of the sea has given way to the glassy ripple of a lake, a Swiss lake, perhaps reminiscent of those of Godard's childhood. Paraphrasing a Jacques Brel song, we can say that it is the lake that has imprisoned the river of love. The lake is a prison. In the film, love blooms only at the film's conclusion, Hollywood *oblige*, after much trouble, many obstacles, after two loves turn out to be the same, two brothers the same man and 'je, un autre'.

Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that one member of those New Wave couples was still on the roam somewhere in the 90s, twenty-five years on, and that for the sake of argument, this 'baladeur' was not an ageing Belmondo but a rather grave-looking Alain Delon and that, as he wanders the highways one day, he is knocked down by a fast, smart car, driven by a beautiful yuppie: not Anna Karina, of course, but her modern avatar—a successful businesswoman in the shape of Domiziana Giordano. If one can imagine this, then one has the film under starter's orders.

Nouvelle Vague divides into two roughly equal parts. For each half, a different Delon and a different love affair, at least so it would seem. Delon will first superbly play a character—himself—who has lost all illusions but still maintains a deathly will to difference as he refuses to gravitate with the rest in symbolic, centripetal circles around the golden lure of Capital. He has not given in, but in doing so is ostensibly a broken man, inhabited by a curious will to nothingness. Once he is cured from his accident by the roadside, the yuppie princess will soon tire of him as all her attempts to goad him into action run aground. Soon she will wish him gone. (Does one not feel the melody of *Contempt*?) Delon's symbolic weakness is that he cannot swim and soon he will drown under Giordano's indifferent stare.

But, don't be alarmed. Godard, interested in interrogating the other that is in us ('je est un autre') will bring back Delon as his brother and the scenario for the first half of the film will repeat itself almost exactly. With one important difference: the roles are reversed. It is Delon who takes control and the yuppie who is passive and contemplative. The mysterious conclusion sees

a half-ironic, half-romantic Godard attempting to tie together 'je' and 'l'autre' in the miracle of love.

Spoken in all the languages of the future federation of Europe, intertitled periodically in Latin (a perhaps over-conscious desire for a certain artistic rigour), this is a film composed, as far as its verbal portion is concerned, solely of quotations: literary, philosophical, popular maxims. It is for this reason that Godard, with a certain false modesty, refused to place his name in the credits. At a press conference in Cannes, he stated that he was only the conscious organiser of the film.

The choice of quotations enables the film-maker to bypass communication: the dictatorship of question and answer (What are you? Who? What is your opinion?). The actors do not, therefore, so much engage in dialogue as in monologue. They speak for themselves, vying for 'good lines'. The only true communication exists in gestures, images, looks: in other words, outside the domain of verbal language. 'Leave things nameless for a moment,' says the gardener.

To the media's constant, oppressive desire to name everything and everyone, Godard opposes a certain mysticism of the silent image. 'Is the cinema not precisely this nameless moment?' Godard asked at Cannes. Yet however romantic Godard may be, it is important to stress the seeming inevitability

in the film of a business/tv communication or discourse swamping all. It is only against this backdrop that the above has any significant meaning.

But let us return to the quotations. Most—Gide, Faulkner, Hemingway—are literary. They seem to fall into two distinct categories: the poetic or descriptive, such as the use of Faulkner to accompany the stunning images of the lake and its surrounding trees, and the more purely aphoristic or moralistic. The latter often take the form of psychological observations, witticisms or pained, poetic laments.

What is most interesting here is that these myriad and distinct sources reveal a manifest discord between all the elements of the film, and yet it is Godard's genius to show simultaneously how, somehow, it all also meshes together, fits. The paucity of communication in the film via dialogue has already been stressed. The question then poses itself: how is the spectator to make sense? How is he to interpret the non-communication of the characters through words? What is he to do, in sum, with those words proposed by the film?

It seems fair to say that the latter operate as aphorisms in the strict sense Nietzsche gives to the aphorism: that it needs to be ruminated. 'An aphorism, properly stamped and moulded, has not been deciphered when it has simply

been read: one has then rather to begin its exegesis, for which is required an art of exegesis . . . one thing above all is needed . . . a thing for which one must be almost a cow and in any event not a "modern man": rumination' (Preface, *On the Genealogy of Morals*).

The aphorism then, to some extent, always returns. It must always be read twice. Hence, the breakdown of verbal communication between the characters in the film enables the spectator to reassemble the stray sentences and maxims as if they were aphoristic discourse. For as you brush your teeth at night, these sentences will swoop down from the skies like swallows and set you to rumination.

This is one, only one, of many intriguing features of a film wary of verbal communication, of naming things too easily, in short, aware of the tyranny of a certain media, rampant in 1990. Do not ask what this film is about. See it! Admire the images! And the music! Do not attempt to make sense of the dialogue. Ruminant it! Chew the cud!

Nouvelle Vague is a film broken into multiple particles, which can only resurface with the intervention of the spectator's hand. We are challenged to use the film any way we can. Viewing a film is a craft, says Godard. In short, Godard's *Nouvelle Vague* is a film of returns, a film to be ruminated. ■

Nouvelle Vague. Left above: Alain Delon.
Below: Domiziana Giordano.



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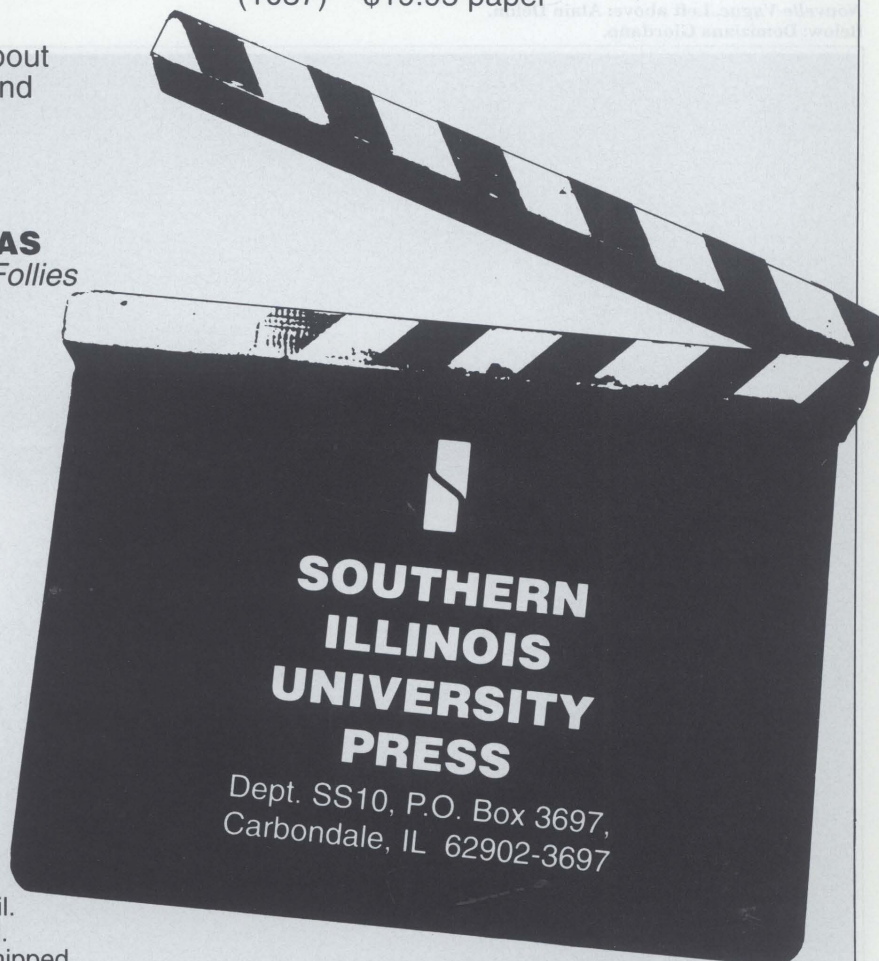
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Wild at Heart: Nicolas Cage, Laura Dern.

THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY WILD AT HEART

Dedicated to the memory of the late *noir* writer Charles Willeford, Barry Gifford's *Wild at Heart* is a lovely little novel about youthful passions, dashed hopes and intricate cross-purposes in a redneck milieu. Split into 45 chapters over a mere 159 pages, it charts the cross-country flight of Sailor and Lula, a recent parolee and his girlfriend, from her hysterical mother, proceeding from the Carolinas to New Orleans to Texas in a picaresque journey that, in the tradition of the eighteenth-century novel, has plenty of room for interpolated stories. More literary in a self-conscious way than Willeford at his best (e.g., *Sideswipe*), it imparts a similar feeling for the vernacular poetry of despair and the way certain people live, think and speak. ('The woman wouldn't be fifty for two or three years yet and she acted like life forgot her address.')

It is hard to imagine a commercial film that could respect the book's form; and to find a commercial film-maker who could respect its characters, milieu and feelings, one would have to look for someone like the Nicholas Ray of *They Live By Night*. The last person to turn to, alas, would be David Lynch, who, as it happens, discovered the novel while it was still in galleys, wrote a first-draft screenplay in six days, and, a little over a year later, won the the Palme d'Or at Cannes for his freewheeling adaptation.

As a director whose talents are essentially non-narrative and painterly—a creator of moods, textures and uncanny dream images—Lynch started his

career with *Eraserhead* at the peak of his powers. Yet it seems that almost every step in his subsequent dilution of that talent has been greeted with a rise in critical praise and audience response—perhaps because his genuine flair for producing disquiet seems more subversive to many as it inches its way into the mainstream.

In *Eraserhead*, at least, one felt he had something highly personal to impart—queasy feelings about parenthood, families, urban poverty and other forms of entrapment. But discounting *The Elephant Man* and *Dune*, where he was working as a hired gun, his present reputation chiefly stems from *Blue Velvet* (where he managed to push all the right Hitchcock buttons) and *Twin Peaks* (where he smuggled his eccentric style into primetime soap opera). Both works are predicated on the puritanical notion that the world is full of dirty secrets and ineffably evil intentions, countered by an Eagle Scout's sense of the good and the innocent (embodied mainly in the Kyle MacLachlan character in both works) that never gets very far beyond the nuances of an Andy Hardy.

As watchable and unpredictable as these works often are, they seem held together by a form of camp irony—a kind of facetiousness about wholesome images of the American Dream—that threatens to unhinge their premises at every turn, creating a kind of suspense which seems more tenable in mysteries and serials than in less

open-ended forms, such as love stories.

Wild at Heart (Palace), a love story, has a half-hearted mystery of sorts, not present in the novel, about what Sailor (Nicolas Cage) did or didn't see when the father of Lula (Laura Dern) perished in a fire, apparently after dousing himself in kerosene and lighting a match. Why he might have killed himself is characteristically never even discussed, but we do know that Lula's mother Marietta (Diane Ladd)—a neurotic in the novel, a raving lunatic in the film—has two boyfriends, (Harry Dean Stanton and J. E. Freeman), the latter a paid killer, and that she enlists both men to retrieve Lula and/or get rid of Sailor. We also know via flashbacks that Marietta sexually propositioned Sailor (recalling a scene in *Eraserhead*) shortly before he beat a black man to death, the incident that landed him in prison.

But trying to make sense of the movie's story as a mystery, or even as a plot in any ordinary sense, is ultimately to play a fool's game. Lynch uses Gifford's novel (with kinky additions) chiefly as an armature and a come-on for a series of lurid imaginings, an anthology of shocks and conceits that is tied to a plot only in the sense that a boat is moored to a dock. Repeated close-ups of cigarettes being lit and recurring flashbacks to the death of Lula's father seem designed to conjure a mystery, but at best they only suggest yet another dirty little secret that the movie never quite gets round to uncovering.

Perhaps the major problem is that despite Cage and Dern's best efforts, Lynch is ultimately interested only in iconography, not characters at all. When it comes to images of evil, corruption, derangement, raw passion and mutilation (roughly in that order), *Wild at Heart* is a veritable cornucopia. Some of these are borrowed (the dog bearing a man's hand comes from *Yojimbo*), while others qualify as generic creations, but none quite add up to characters. Willem Dafoe's Bobby Peru, the most detailed of these, is outfitted with stumpy gums and a pencil moustache resembling John Waters'—leading one to the alarming suspicion that Waters has now become an influence on Lynch, which other details, such as a display of obese porn queens, seem to corroborate.

And when it comes to images of goodness and innocence, even whatever we may find likeable about Sailor and Lula is largely undermined by camp pop iconography—Elvis Presley in relation to Sailor, and *The Wizard of Oz* in relation to Sailor, Lula and even a stray walk-on or two (such as Jack Nance). Both these references come together in an elaborate mock happy ending, light years away from anything in Gifford, which seems sadly to demonstrate only the desperation of a surrealist vaudevilian stuck for a finish.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM



White Hunter, Black Heart: Clint Eastwood.

DO THE WRONG THING WHITE HUNTER, BLACK HEART

After a biography of Charlie Parker, an almost-biography of John Huston, and the troubles he created for himself and his company while filming *The African Queen*, Clint Eastwood has begun to make others the centre of his films—rather than variations of Dirty Harry or the Man with No Name. In the process his films have acquired a deepening sombreness, and an increasing reputation in European circles looking for new American directors to canonise.

It could be argued that these bio-pics aren't really better than his striking but little-regarded earlier films, which were so much about his own two personae—respectively, *The Gauntlet* and *The Outlaw Josey Wales*. What, though, is most fascinating about *Bird* and now *White Hunter, Black Heart* is that Eastwood still seems to be working through a self-critical agenda: about himself, about performing, about the egoism and vulnerability of the artist, about the artist as man of action who seeks simplicity in his art and a similar reduction—self-destruction—in himself. All that's changed is that this is now put in the third person.

To be sure, Eastwood himself is the star of *White Hunter, Black Heart* (Warner Bros), but for the first time in a character role. The part of John Huston (or 'John Wilson', in screenwriter Peter Viertel's novel about his experiences on *The African Queen*) might be thought close enough to the 'tough' character, pared-away in thought and deed, that Eastwood projects as both actor and director. The difference is that Huston's action ethos is all bluff and gamesmanship, florid and extrovert, while

Eastwood's is existentially tight and taciturn.

So Eastwood has had to approach the role from the outside, and the first part of the film has a curiously idling air, as if existential matters have reluctantly been put aside while Eastwood first 'does' Huston: the intimidating heartiness, the charm and egoism conveyed with a condescending touch of acquired Irishness. One feels both that the film's sense of imposture about Huston is right—from the opening scene of a red-coated Wilson out fox-hunting, for no better reason than that it goes with the English country house he has taken over during production—and that Eastwood is uncomfortable playing this kind of imposter.

The awkwardness, though, serves the film in a strange way. It's as if *White Hunter, Black Heart* had opened up the gap that exists in any Huston film between the playful surfaces and the depths beneath. Eastwood's John Wilson is a game-player caught out, caught between the easy mockery and smooth blarney with which he treats those involved in his film—beginning with his writer, Viertel himself, here 'Pete Verrill' (Jeff Fahey), and extending to the Bogart (Richard Vanstone) and Hepburn (Marisa Berenson) lookalikes dragged to ever more inaccessible locations in Africa—and the self-authenticating experience he is seeking en route. This has nothing to do with the film he is supposed to be making, called *The African Trader*, or the African Something, as he off-handedly announces to Verrill, but his desire to shoot an elephant.

When Verrill protests that it's a crime to shoot such a noble beast, Wilson replies that it's not, it's a sin. The desire to commit a sin suggests that Wilson's disdain for others covers an even greater disdain for himself; that in sinning he is also courting retribution, and his self-authenticating experience will inevitably be a self-destructive one. Self-destruction is the Eastwood theme: if Charlie Parker drove himself on the rocks with drink and drugs, John Wilson does it with sheer bloody-mindedness.

It's around this theme that the Eastwood and Huston personae fuse. The film is summed up by the speech in which Wilson tells Verrill that he has agreed to do the film with producer 'Paul Landers' (George Dzundza), Sam Spiegel by any other name, with whom he has had run-ins before: 'You know why I agreed to work with him again? Because it's the wrong thing to do.' This existential absurdity is snapped out with a snarl in which the Man with No Name for a moment supplants the game-player.

The awkwardness of the first part of the film persists in a different way in the second. Here it's the movie caravan itself, the production that Wilson has undertaken in order to do something else, that seems a distraction, a great deal of fussing and scaffolding around his essential obsession. This too has its justification, because that's exactly what Wilson feels about it, an obligation to be put off as long as possible while he tries to close with the real object of his quest—an encounter with an elephant and what he himself would feel is a Hemingwayesque moment of truth. But the sense of dramatic stalling is also partly Eastwood's, his inability, here and elsewhere, to give a sense of purpose and necessity to scenes and characters not immediately drawn into the hero's obsession. The film seems unsure quite what to do with Wilson until he can be brought face to face with an elephant.

Its solution is such curious scenes as the film company's stay at the Lake Victoria Hotel, where Wilson defends the underdog against the resident colonials, first by humiliating an anti-Semitic Englishwoman and then fist-fighting the manager for mistreating his black staff. Could the point be to prove that, black as Wilson's heart may be, on certain issues it is in the right place? The answer, long-delayed and never directly delivered, is that he might be trying to look outside himself, for someone else to identify with, someone to help him put an end to himself. That someone eventually materialises in the black tracker Kivu (Boy Mathias Chuma), whom Wilson decides, after impatiently trying out various white hunters, is the only one who can take him to his elephant.

The desolating irony to which this

leads is less that Wilson backs down in the encounter than that it leads to Kivu's death, not his own. It's as if the ending of *Bird* had both been repeated (the self-martyrdom of a black character), and mockingly reversed. Instead of consummation in his art, the hero finds only a bleak sham, as he at last settles in the director's chair and gets down to work with a barely whispered 'Action'.

RICHARD COMBS

A LAWYER'S TALE PRESUMED INNOCENT

The body of a beautiful woman, Carolyn Polhemus, is discovered bound and beaten. She had been an ambitious assistant in the Kindle County prosecutor's office. She knew her assailant. Her colleague and, it transpires, a former lover, Rusty Sabich, is assigned the case. Chief Prosecutor Horgan is up for re-election in a scrappy political fight; a swift arrest is imperative. In due course, Rusty, an honest man with trouble at home, finds himself charged with Carolyn's murder. Certainties dissolve and his life spirals into the void. Not in itself a novel plot line, but in *Presumed Innocent*, an expansive first novel, Scott Turow struck gold.

Written in a coolly literate, faintly detached style, the novel peels open a succession of dark secrets, until in the calm after the climax, when justice has been done, it springs its blackest surprise. Again, not particularly original. The novel's singularity, however, derives from Turow's skill in describing the atmosphere of the courtroom (the author was a former prosecuting attorney in Chicago) and the psychology and details of the defence lawyer's art. The command of dialogue, the ritualised though not always stately exchanges of lawyers and judges, is superb. Turow's second achievement is to touch on arguments about the meaning and possi-

Paul Winfield.



Presumed Innocent: Raul Julia, Bonnie Bedelia, Harrison Ford.

bility of justice within the American legal system without for a second breaking the pace of his absorbing plot. Melancholy, precise, hard to forget.

Alan J. Pakula's adaptation of *Presumed Innocent* (Warner Bros) covers familiar territory. The fragility of justice when it tangles with judicial corruption and the dogged unravelling of an at first almost unbelievable crime was treated in *All the President's Men*. And the prostitute stalked by a former client was the subject of *Klute*. (Greta Scacchi's Carolyn materialises in flashbacks. She is not exactly a working girl, though she is sometimes deliberately framed as a fashion plate, but she uses her body just as dispassionately as Jane Fonda's Bree Daniels.)

A certain old-fashioned economy of means is one of Alan Pakula's strengths. In *All the President's Men*, for instance, he succeeded in filming William Goldman's boiled-down script without apparently losing the complexity of the original book. *Presumed Innocent*, though, presents another kind of challenge. The fictional universe of Kindle County (the exteriors were taken in Detroit) is quite as inbred and sealed as that of Woodward and Bernstein's Washington. Rusty's quest to save himself, however, requires a type of painful self-examination that never troubled the two mustard-keen reporters, chasing their slips of paper and triple checking their facts.

Rusty Sabich's interior world registers openly and sometimes painfully on Harrison Ford's passive face. He has an unflattering haircut and a small but disfiguring blemish on his chin, a scar perhaps. He is rumpled and, in a movie filled with vivid, talkative characters, almost deliberately empty. The camera often observes him seated alone,

plunged in his troubles, not knowing what to do. Once a single tear streaks down his face. The performance gains our sympathy; but the sharpness of mind which Turow describes is perhaps inevitably absent.

The movie, scripted by Frank Pierson and Pakula, fillets the novel in a workmanlike fashion; and it is effectively unified by the overstated classical architecture and adornments of the court (production design by George Jenkins) and Gordon Willis' menacing long shots of conversations by shadowed pillars and dusky marble staircases. For a film marked by desaturated images, there is, too, an occasionally striking use of vivid colours. In one encounter, for instance, between Horgan (Brian Dennehy) and Rusty's lawyer Sandy Stern, there is a striking balance between the discreet mauve of Stern's tie and the red of Horgan's, which is backed up by some spiky red flowers and an immense red painting.

Where *Presumed Innocent* really takes off, though, and begins to catch an authentic flavour of the book is in the courtroom performances. Paul Winfield, as the judge before whom Rusty eventually appears, has an imposing presence; and his superficial vulgarity and demeaning mispronunciation of the prosecutor Della Guardia's name rings just as true as his gravity. The book's most heroic character, if not perhaps the film's, is Sandy Stern, an Argentinian of Jewish parentage, whose subsequent misfortunes are the subject of Turow's second novel, *The Burden of Proof*. Raul Julia plays him with a pleasing suave dignity, an antidote, somehow, to the surrounding sleaze from which no one is immune and an at least partial vindication of the legal system he reveres.

JOHN PYM

STOWAWAY ARACHNOPHOBIA

The fear of spiders, according to the National Institute of Mental Health in the United States, is the most common phobia, with the fear of heights coming second. Getting one's friends in to see the scary and very amusing *Arachnophobia* (Warner Bros) isn't always easy. This writer's mostly say, 'No, thanks.' The Mental Health Institute further tells us that arachnophobics, even when successful at avoiding spiders, may be haunted by them in dreams, and that the presence of a real spider, combined with darkness, thunder, lightning, or just being alone, increases the heart rate and induces perspiration. Some people freeze, are unable to move at all at such moments. These are sad cases.

Luckily for the producers of this film, arachnophobics are far, far outnumbered—at least in the United States, where *Arachnophobia* was one of this summer's top box-office attractions. Certainly, healthy American children growing up in the western part of the country in my day weren't—presumably still aren't—afraid of spiders, of tarantulas and Black Widows, which we hunted.

Black Widows often make their nests in loose rock walls. The idea was to frighten them back under the rocks, then with a stick to fish out the woven wheat-coloured bag containing the spider's young, about the size of a marble, and set a match to it. The bag would burst and hundreds of pinhead-size Black Widows—also wheat-coloured—would swarm out and burn up. After that, one's father came with a blow torch and shot a long flame into the wall.

I never heard of anyone being killed by a Black Widow, though they were reputed to give a nasty bite; according to the newspapers, the rare victims were children or extremely old or sick people. As for tarantulas, they were just overrated sleepy old monsters more apt to be frightened themselves into frozen immobility. People kept them in glass boxes and fed them dead flies or bits of hamburger. It is from these harmless childish pursuits, and the fears of a relatively small number of Americans, that Amblin Entertainment have created their very funny suspense comedy. It has the grace and airiness of a classic Hitchcock thriller.

The story—not as tightly composed as Hitchcock, but never mind—starts like this. A fashionable entomologist, played by Julian Sands, leads an expedition into the South American rain forest in search of specimens. One of the members of the expedition dies mysteriously and his body is shipped home to California, but before it can be put on the plane, the Venezuelan tarantula which



John Goodman ('Rambo').

bit him, whose normal diet is birds and mice, hitches a ride to the States in the dead man's coffin. The coffin arrives at an undertaking establishment in a small California town called Canaima. This pretty hamlet, like the funeral parlour itself, which looks like a Victorian *bonbonnerie*, would be hard to beat for charm. The tarantula escapes unnoticed, and soon makes its way to the old barn of an attractive young couple called Ross and Molly Jennings (Jeff Daniels and Harley Jane Kozak). He is a doctor and she was once a stockbroker, and they have recently left bad, poisonous old San Francisco for this small, clean town where they may bring up their two children decently.

The Venezuelan spider, once in its new home, finds company and mates with a small, much less glamorous female of low but sturdy origins (entomology rather goes out the window here; it's usually the female spider who calls the shots and who eats her husband after mating, as every schoolchild knows). After the spiders' night of love—there is a scene of their foreplay—horror piles on horror as their numerous progeny terrorise the neighbourhood. It is the classic Hitchcock situation: into the perfect upper middle-class American family, living the good life in one of the most attractively homey of Spielberg and Co homes, in a town sweet and unshadowed, comes the deadly intruder. Death, swift and terrible, lurks in every lampshade, Teddy

bear and bowl of popcorn, and in the wine cellar, where Ross Jennings keeps his vintage bottles. To make matters worse, he suffers from acute arachnophobia.

The dexterity of the spiders as they merrily look for their prey is matched by the dexterity of Frank Marshall's direction in its nimbleness and sense of fun. The tiny killers go skipping on their way, swinging down jauntily on filaments over the heads of the unsuspecting victims, who go about the small details of their small-town lives (much of the fun of this film is watching these good citizens of Canaima pottering about moments before their end). Finally, as this *danse macabre* gains in speed (and as the audience shriek and pull their feet up off the floor and on to their seats), the spiders come scrambling out of every possible opening in the Jennings house.

The technical skills demonstrated in *Arachnophobia* are of a very high order. The killers were real (if harmless) spiders brought from New Zealand, and were put through their paces by spider 'wranglers', with the help of such devices as heat guns, invisible vibrating wires and Lemon Pledge (a furniture polish), to help 'motivate' the creatures to go in a certain direction. The Venezuelan stowaway of the story was also real, but he had a mechanical stand-in. Marshall, who up to now has served as Steven Spielberg's producer on such films as *Empire of the Sun*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *The Color Purple* and *Poltergeist*—the latter an admirable warm-up for the present film—has been fortunate, too, with his human cast, all sharply playing the well-observed and wittily written two-legged characters.

Especially good were Jeff Daniels, John Goodman (as the Rambo-style, flame-throwing exterminator), Roy Brooksmith (the town mortician), Henry Jones (playing an opinionated ass of a doctor), and Julian Sands, the utterly humourless, utterly self-absorbed entomologist, who would rather, one is sure, go to a smart dinner party, or give an interview to *People* magazine, than go out to imperilled Canaima when the connection to his Venezuelan expedition is finally made by the terrified townspeople.

There is a funny last scene, worthy of the Master. Ross and Molly Jennings, who, along with their children, have survived the final onslaught of spiders, decide that perhaps San Francisco isn't that bad after all. We find them sitting in their glossy new high-rise apartment overlooking the sparkling Bay, drinking a bottle of his salvaged wine. They are in something of a self-congratulatory mood, but then there is an alarming rumble, everything sways, and as they abruptly scramble out of the last frame, the bottle they leave behind goes tottering over.

JAMES IVORY

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BOOK REVIEWS

THE MEN WHO FELL TO EARTH

MY INDECISION IS FINAL

The Rise and Fall of Goldcrest Films

by Jake Eberts and Terry Illott
Faber/£17.50

The reluctant demise of Goldcrest was simply the most charismatic of all too many failures among the 'indies' of the 1980s. Cannon, Dino De Laurentiis, Weintraub . . . None of these possessed the heroic dimension that Goldcrest brought as if by divine right to its destiny.

This peculiarly British enterprise was founded by Jake Eberts in January 1977 and was weaned on the 'desire to be perceived as a reliable source of development finance for a family of producers.' When its first major production, *Chariots of Fire*, won the Academy Award for Best Picture and three other Oscars, the name of Goldcrest was established.

Already, however, ironies abounded. Jake Eberts was a Canadian investment banker, a 'foreigner' just as Alexander Korda had been before him; the company had invested only £17,700 in *Chariots of Fire*, which provoked the real risk-takers—Fox, Dodi Fayed and Allied Stars—to emphasise their ownership in a series of ads in the trade press; and when Goldcrest Films International held its first board meeting to disperse some of the £8.2 million raised from Pearson Longman, Electra and other investors, it plumped for a couple of very non-British projects, Joe Dante's *The Howling* and John Carpenter's *Escape from New York*.

Eberts now recounts this story, aided but not abetted by the financial journalist Terry Illott, in an exhaustive book that could have been 200 pages shorter. Yet somehow the bloated, epic heft of the volume suits an organisation that gave birth to such films as *Gandhi*, *The Mission*, and the misbegotten *Revolution*. Eberts heads a cast of thousands, most of whom seem to have been interviewed by Illott so that you feel you have attended every meeting, every screening, and sat in every plane that involved Goldcrest's protagonists.

Budget breakdowns and statistics cannot blur the essential reasons for the company's fate. For a start, it had no assets to speak of. Gaumont under Daniel Toscan du Plantier invested with similar idealism and foolishness in even more films than Goldcrest during the early 1980s, but escaped from the jaws of death thanks to its infrastructure as a major distributor and exhibitor.

Again like Gaumont, Eberts and his merry men gave altogether too much credit to the *auteur* principle. Directors such as John Boorman, Hugh Hudson and even the neophyte Julien Temple worked without anything like the degree of supervision they would have encountered at a major studio. An immense amount of time was devoted to raising money, not enough to managing its expenditure.

Eberts himself appears in these pages to be too nice an individual to say no when he should have done. He even allowed his first sales chief, Pedro Teitelbaum, to live and travel at a level of luxury reserved for the super-rich—except that Goldcrest was paying the bills. He concealed from his wife a huge personal debt incurred when he backed *Zulu Dawn* back in the 1970s, and in consequence had to succumb to a lucrative offer from Hollywood's Embassy Pictures, thus leaving Goldcrest exposed at a stage—late 1983—when it most urgently required his entrepreneurial skills.

Two of the liveliest and most prestigious personalities involved with Goldcrest, Sir Richard Attenborough and David Puttnam, needed the company's financial aid for their personal projects and could not give full-time attention to admin. This chore was left in the dispassionate hands of James Lee, who had come aboard Goldcrest as part of the price for Pearson Longman's investment, and who remains throughout this book a shadow-player, the obverse of Eberts and short on flair and flamboyance. Yet Lee, according to Attenborough, displayed the 'guts that got *Gandhi* completed'. He emerges from the saga as an antagonist only, one feels, because he knew how to add up figures and could see the abyss into which Goldcrest might plunge at any moment.

As the authors say in their preface, 'in no walk of life is there such confusion between reality and fantasy as in the world of the movies.' Goldcrest refused to keep its sights low. A *Room with a View* is the exception in a succession of mega-projects that could be justified only on the grounds that big is beautiful, and big investments embody the potential for huge profits (the Merchant-Ivory film brought Goldcrest £1.4 million on a budget share of £475,000, but *Gandhi* earned the company £6.3 million net).

The mushrooming nature of movie budgets, comparable only to the cost of missile systems and the Channel Tunnel, lured Goldcrest to disaster. Both *The Mission* and *Revolution* exceeded their business plan forecast by

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millions of dollars, and Goldcrest found itself dangerously exposed on a limited number of projects. The suave reactions of the Midland Bank and Credit Lyonnais, as they declined to save the sinking ship, are chronicled by Ilott with the meticulousness of a coroner.

This tragic enterprise seems, however, to lack a villain. The few people described in disparaging terms linger on the edges of Goldcrest's horizon—the Indian family that withdrew a promised \$4 million from *Gandhi* after shooting had already begun, or Jerry Perenchio, one-time co-owner of Embassy. By contrast, everyone at Goldcrest's London HQ laboured long and hard for the fortunes of the company. Salesmen like Bill Gavin and Guy East emerge from the book with credit, as does lawyer-cum-businessman David Norris. The authors try, one feels, to point the finger at the 'creative' individuals whose work cost Goldcrest so much blood, sweat and dollars, but conclude by exonerating the Boormans and Hudsons of this world, recognising that such directors must forever be wrestling with the conflicting dictates of Art and Money.

My Indecision Is Final is a book full of sadness as well as exhilaration. An appendix shows how nine of the films with which Goldcrest was closely involved took \$109.5 million at the US box-office over a six-year period, winning 19 Oscars and more than fifty BAFTAs in the process. So long as films can reap that kind of income and prestige, idealistic entrepreneurs like Jake Eberts will be tempted to develop them.

PETER COWIE

ROOM FILM

SCHRADER ON SCHRADER & OTHER WRITINGS

by Kevin Jackson
Faber and Faber/£12.99

At the beginning of this interview book with critic and filmmaker Paul Schrader, Kevin Jackson is careful to specify that he is dealing with two creative personalities, not one. '... It would be wrong to regard the time Schrader went on to spend as a film student, reviewer and editor as no more than an apprentice period, and it would be unfairly dismissive to read the critical essays he wrote in those years only for the insights they offer on his subsequent work... Paul Schrader would still have earned a niche in film history if he had never written a screenplay or gone near a camera.'

It's irresistible, of course, to go 'retrospective clue hunting' in

the critical writing—eight fascinating examples of which are offered here, including a negative review of *Easy Rider* that got Schrader fired from the *L.A. Free Press*. And at the end of his introduction, Jackson gives in by drawing his own connections between Schrader's critical enthusiasms for Bresson, Rossellini and Peckinpah and his subsequent films.

But reading Schrader's critical pieces in conjunction with his first-hand account of his career, one is struck that the relationship between the two personalities is more tense, difficult, contentious and interesting than this would suggest. Rather than an amiable couple who have something to say about each other, the Schraders seem to be a more antagonistic duo—the antagonism all the greater because of what they have in common—locked in one room together.

The image of that room recurs throughout what Schrader says here, from his review of Rossellini's *The Rise to Power of Louis XIV* ('There are few wide open spaces: most scenes take place in claustrophobic, baroque rooms with the sycophants crowding the frame for a place near Louis'), to his discussion of his own claustrophobia and its effect on his films ('part of the psychological violence in the films is to do with people who feel themselves penned up and strike out irrationally... in the same way a person locked in a closet will smash his head into the door and knock himself out'), to the way, while shooting, he will edit in an aesthetic position ('I want to have the choice of not using it. I don't want to have the option of being cowardly in the editing room').

This book is the story of a marriage, of the dualism which Schrader feels within himself, a thirst for purity and the knowledge of necessary corruption. At the beginning of his film-making career, he defined that as a split between one who thinks about and one who participates in that process. 'My thinking about films is schizoid. There's a big fork in the road where criticism was essentially sacred and screenwriting profane. I am looking forward to the time when I can bring them back together.'

The split seems no closer to being healed, as Schrader, having discussed the drive towards redemption of all his films, also waxes enthusiastic about the movies as a popular art and his own wish to be thought of as a Hollywood director. 'And obviously that's reflected in the films I've done, that unease with

being either too corrupt or too pure. Trying somehow to be both at the same time.'

The irony is, as Schrader acknowledges, that starting from a consciously religious drive (with its brief in his oft-invoked Calvinist background) to redeem his tortured heroes, to offer them the moment of grace that would conclude a film by his touchstones, Bresson or Ozu, Schrader makes it harder for himself because he is working with such impure material, what he himself describes as the exhilarating 'ride' of a popular movie. Without for a moment mentioning or drawing on religious precepts, Ozu's moments of grace would be sprung from the most determinedly mundane and unexhilarating material.

This points to the essential play-off between Schrader as critic and film-maker. As a member of what he calls Movie Brats, Inc, the latter has been pitched into the most hyped era of the director as superstar, while what the former admires is self-effacement in art, the sublimation of personality and idiosyncrasy in tradition and archetype.

What, in fact, makes Schrader's criticism, in the late 60s and early 70s, so interesting and

premonitory is its anti-auteurist slant, his insistence that a director like Budd Boetticher belongs to a tradition of 'great intuitive, primitive art' ('the bullfight has often been compared to the Mass'). Schrader's film protagonists give us no choice—his insistence that every scene in *Taxi Driver* be taken from Travis Bickle's viewpoint—but to share the box of these pent-up identification figures, these 'lonely, self-deluded, sexually inactive people', yearning to break free.

More than any other film interview book, *Schrader on Schrader* comes with its own argument, the dialectic of subject and comment, text and reflection, embedded in its subject. Jackson does well to bring these out simply through his organisation of Schrader's self and other-commentary. But this also leaves him with the problem of what function his own commentary, the necessarily limited introduction, can serve.

This must always strike an uneasy balance between criticism and endorsement of a career in the vaguest terms of artistic development. But here one is particularly aware of the gap between the endorsement—'A decade ago, James Monaco predicted that, if he were able to

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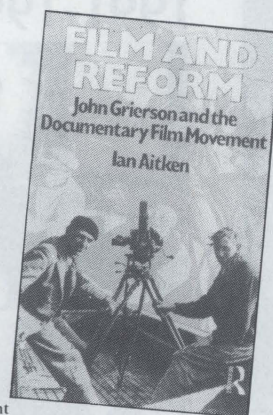
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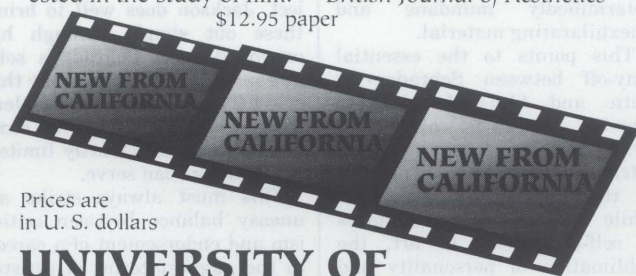
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BOOK REVIEWS

overcome his "torturous anxieties", Schrader may turn out to be one of the most intellectually and emotionally interesting of the new generation of American directors. That time appears to have come—and Schrader's evidence that the anxieties remain as torturous as ever. As he says of current working habits: 'It goes back to what we were saying about the dichotomy between a creative sensibility and a critical sensibility. You have to ride your instincts, you've got to get the critic outside the room and close the door.'

RICHARD COMBS

A VIEW OF THE BUS STATION

THE MAN BETWEEN:

A Biography of Carol Reed

by Nicholas Wapshott

Chatto & Windus/£18

Carol Reed badly needed a good biography: a book that would chart the pendulum swings between the golden age of *The Third Man* and the doldrums of much that came later; one that would probe and possibly explode Reed's diffident claims to be a simple craftsman, uninterested in personal artistry; one that would explore the key fact, missing from all established reference books, that Reed was the illegitimate son of Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, ram-paging glory of the late Victorian and Edwardian theatre.

Nicholas Wapshott, political editor of the *Observer*, and a past biographer of Margaret Thatcher and Peter O'Toole, loses no time in digging up the Tree connection. During the first two chapters—some fifty pages—Carol Reed is born in a passing sentence. Otherwise we are plunged paragraph upon paragraph into Tree's domestic whirlpool: fiercely independent Lady Maud and their children in one house, loving mistress May Reed (née Pinney) and their children in another. The copious material at least paves the way for several of Reed's own character traits: his fondness for the theatrical profession; a persistent interest, through many of his films, in the innocent child at large in an adult world; his habitual secrecy about personal matters and immoderate modesty about his film-making gifts.

Tree's amours also point towards Reed's turbulent adventures. At the end of the 20s he enjoyed a heady, one-sided fling with Daphne du Maurier. In 1943, he cruelly forged ahead with marriage to the actress Diana Wynyard, though he was already head over heels in love with another lissom English rose, Penelope Dudley Ward

(whose mother had been the secret mistress of Edward, Prince of Wales, before the onset of Mrs Wallis Simpson). After four years, Reed and Wynyard divorced, and Reed finally married his true love, 'Pempie', as she was always called.

Wapshott's book, written with the friendly assistance of Reed's own family, certainly lets fresh air into the stale atmosphere of most writing about the director. Yet there is still room for a good Reed biography. For too much of the time, the author glides hastily over his material, scattering errors and dangerous loose phrasing. Admittedly, he faced understandable problems in conjuring up a private life kept in the shadows for so long. Reed's childhood at King's School, Canterbury, is particularly blank: apart from a run of generalised comments (leaning heavily on the memoirs of Michael Powell—a fellow pupil, though the two had no known contact), the only concrete evidence Wapshott can offer is a grievous affair about a stolen biscuit tin, for which the innocent Reed nobly shouldered the blame.

But once Reed serves his theatre apprenticeship with Edgar Wallace and becomes launched in the cinema, the material still seems too dependent on the words and recollections of others. Wapshott might almost be following Reed's own dictum: just tell the story, and to hang with your personal viewpoint. Private scrapbooks have been scoured; reviews have been dutifully collated; autobiographies of Michael Redgrave, Jessie Matthews and company have been stacked up for extensive quotation. All this, though, is largely at the expense of any direct response to the films themselves.

We are incautiously told that no prints have survived of *It Happened in Paris* (Reed's first film) and *The Talk of the Devil*; the National Film Archive has viewable copies of both. Even when the films are common enough, the author keeps his thoughts to a minimum—a panning shot praised here, a performance there. The scissors-and-paste method brings its best results when there are tales to tell of turmoil behind the scenes: muddle, haste and financial constraints during *The Man Between*; the horrendous spectacle of Brando's ego galloping away with *Mutiny on the Bounty* (where Reed was replaced by Lewis Milestone). The biggest casualty in the book is *Outcast of the Islands*, where Wapshott simply parrots the harsh contemporary reception: rough justice for one of Reed's most haunting films.

Mistakes and slipshod state-

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ments abound. British silent directors, Wapshott believes, were ousted from the studios once talkies arrived; *Blackmail* contains just 'a few words and sound effects'; John Ford made a wartime documentary called *Why We Fight*. Far pleasanter to mull over the pleasing titbits scattered through the pages: the occasion when Reed decided to jump over a row of gilt chairs at the Georges V Hotel, Paris; the mina bird and alarm clock that whistled the Harry Lime theme; Reed's passion for observing passers-by, which led him to buy a flat in Cannes with a commanding view of the bus station. Sadly, this biography never advances beyond commonplace thoughts about Reed the film-maker; but at least Reed the man seems a little more tangible than before.

GEOFF BROWN

SCOTLAND BE DAMMED

SCOTLAND IN FILM

by Forsyth Hardy
Edinburgh University Press/
£19.50, (paper) £8.95

In 'Two Bills and Some Others', the penultimate chapter of his book, Forsyth Hardy sets out to deal with the Scottish films of the 1980s, and eventually arrives at Bill Bryden's *Ill Fares the Land* (the two Bills, incidentally, are Douglas and Forsyth). He makes clear his dislike of the film—basically on the grounds that Bryden plays fast and loose with some of the facts of the evacuation of St Kilda—and his scorn for the extravagant praise which it received from some quarters, such as (he quotes) 'the most moving and resonant of all new Scottish films, in which a half-forgotten episode in Scotland's past becomes a powerful and damning allegory of the country's present.'

I mention this partly to declare a small interest in reviewing *Scotland in Film* (since the words quoted are mine), but also to signal the nature of what's most disappointing about it. In the past decade there has been a lot of critical writing about Scottish cinema, by critics such as John Caughie and Colin McArthur, and one could reasonably expect that Forsyth Hardy would want to engage in a detailed way with the critical arguments which have been so long in debate.

No one, in fact, is better placed in this respect than Hardy. His devotion to the cause of Scottish film-making is fierce, and his distinguished and astonishingly long career as journalist, critic, producer, administrator and tireless agitator within Scottish film institutions gives him the

natural high ground in every aspect of the subject.

But Hardy's attitude to such debates is a curious one. While he rarely acknowledges them specifically, he's clearly aware of them, especially when he declares his aim as being to suggest 'a path through the myths to reality'. The myths (mainly Hollywood representations of Scotland) get it mostly in the neck, beginning with an amusing account of Hardy's increasingly desperate experience of guiding Arthur Freed round possible locations for *Brigadoon*. Reality makes an entrance in the shape of Grierson and the 1930s documentary movement, followed by politics and the establishment of Films of Scotland in 1954—which gave Hardy the chance to depict the Scotland he wanted to see on the screen and resulted in the remarkable figure of 150 films between 1955 and 1982, made by independent Scottish companies.

These films (mostly sponsored documentaries, though there were some flirtations with experimentalism and fiction) were very well received in their day but attracted fierce criticism in the 1980s (in, for example, *Scotch Reels*, a book Hardy declines to list in his bibliography) for their vision of Scotland. It soon becomes clear, however, that Hardy has no intention of engaging with these critics beyond permitting himself the odd aside; instead he devotes these pages to a rather bland, anecdotal survey of some of the output. They yield a good joke about Grierson wanting to call a film about hydro-electricity *Scotland Be Dammed*, but they convey little of the energy and persistence with which Hardy set about getting the films made and promoted—or of the allegedly frequent conflicts between Hardy and the film-makers about the nature of the films.

The note of authority in the opening sections becomes even more muted when Hardy turns to the emergence of a feature film cinema in the late 1970s, heralded by Bill Forsyth's *That Sinking Feeling*. Indeed, the closer *Scotland in Film* approaches the present, the less convincing it becomes, as if Hardy finds it difficult to generate much real enthusiasm for what the current generation of film-makers have done with the resources denied their predecessors.

The dispensation of praise becomes dutiful in tone, and minor but surprising mistakes begin to creep in—Paul Young, not Tom Watson, plays the husband in *Another Time, Another Place*; the Scottish Film Production Fund is a separate body from the Scottish Film Council, not part

of it. More significantly, there are strange omissions: no mention of Jim Gillespie's *Happy the Man*, Gillies MacKinnon's *Passing Glory* or Michael Caton-Jones' *The Riveter*, all short films which presage striking talents and deserve attention in their own right.

But the most serious lapse is the near-complete lack of reference to how the Scottish feature film cinema of the 1980s emerged: the 'Cinema in a Small Country' conference, the intervention of the Scottish Arts Council in funding, the later collaboration between SAC and SFC in setting up the Production Fund, the emergence of Scots from the National Film and Television School, the creation of the Scottish Film Training Trust and, above all, the arrival of Channel 4 as a radically new source of money and outlet for Scottish film-making. These initiatives form an essential part of the story and their absence makes the closing parts of the book seriously incomplete.

The underlying problem of *Scotland in Film*, however, remains that of its critical stance. Perhaps the problem is that while the mythicising of Scotland is pretty obvious when it's there, the nature of what Hardy

means by its opposite, 'reality', is never really tackled. It seems ultimately to be limited to the physical: the facts of the matter, the documentary ideal of a place and a social fabric which the camera records rather than creates. Hence Hardy's problem with *Ill Fares the Land*, which has a veneer of reality, but presents the St Kilda islanders in mythic terms, in the bitter Fordian perspective of dispossessed communities exiled from the Garden, like the Indians in *Cheyenne Autumn* or the Okies in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

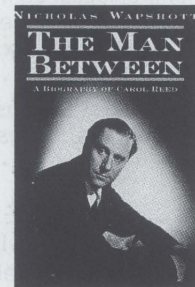
And even the most blatant of myths can transcend 'reality'. Take *Brigadoon*, 'the archetypical film of a bogus Scotland' as Hardy calls it. To paraphrase slightly, Freed went back to Hollywood after his hunt for locations and said he had looked for Scotland but couldn't find it. Metaphorically, we know what he meant; and in a magical year in which Glasgow emerged from the mists of post-industrialism to become European City of Culture and may return to those mists as the bells usher out 1990, I wonder if, after all, *Brigadoon* may have got everything wrong about Scotland but the truth.

JOHN BROWN

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SIR,—I am writing in response to Kevin Brownlow's letter in which he described the script for *Napoléon* by Abel Gance as 'disappearing without trace' and suggested that 'film books are seldom treated with any flair by the publicity departments of publishers'. In answer to the first point raised, this book was sent to all film critics, literary editors and film magazines and promoted in the same way as any other title. Far from being ignored, a full-length review, com-

plete with illustration, appeared in *The Times* on 10 February and the book was also reviewed in the *Guardian* and the *TES*.

In response to the second point raised, it is worth mentioning that two years ago Faber launched a highly ambitious promotion for the film and play lists. This involved touring the country with writers and arranging talks to tie in with screenings, and features in the media on the publishing of scripts. Film and theatre directors and writers took part—John Boorman, David

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Yours faithfully,
ANNE ELLETON
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Roger & Me

SIR,—Like many appraisals of *Roger & Me*, John Harkness' piece in *SIGHT AND SOUND* (Spring 1990) misses the point.

The point is: the film brought home a fact many people had never before considered, namely that General Motors' behaviour

in Flint, Michigan, is indeed 'what multi-national corporations do all the time.' Mr Harkness assumes everyone knows this. Everyone does not.

To say that Michael Moore's film 'fails because it is ultimately harmless' is ridiculous. I live in General Motors country. I have seen its victims. Believe me, *Roger & Me* is the truth, and if truth is 'harmless' I'll eat my hat.

Yours faithfully,
D. G. WALDRON
Royal Oak, Michigan

Stallone

SIR,—I have been commissioned to write a biography of Sylvester Stallone, to be published in the autumn of 1991, and am keen to hear from anyone, from inside or beyond the film industry, who has a consuming interest in this actor and his films.

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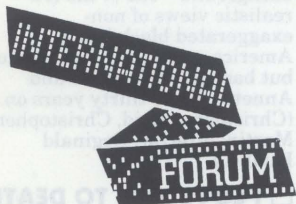
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ON NOW

■ AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE

(Artificial Eye)

Jane Campion followed *Sweetie* with this adaptation (for television) of a trio of autobiographies by New Zealand novelist Janet Frame. Gentler and less bizarre than the earlier film, it is nevertheless fuelled by the same spiky sense of oddness, especially in the impressionistic early scenes where Janet, as an unprepossessingly pudgy child, gazes hopefully out at a world replete with intriguing mysteries but obstinately refusing to become wonderful. As she grows up to be a painfully shy adolescent, suffers shock treatment for schizophrenia and fights her way to lionisation in literary London, a perhaps inevitable sense of *déjà vu* (How I Became an Author, etc) creeps in. Impressive, all the same. (Kerry Fox.)

■ BREAKING IN

(Castle Premier)

An ageing burglar and an aimless teenager meet cute when they break into the same house, one after loot, the other because he enjoys raiding strange refrigerators and making apple-pie beds. Burt Reynolds is superb as the burglar, a cynic trusting no one but himself, who decides to take on the boy as a pupil, because his ostensible misanthropy masks a desperate loneliness. Only middlingly successful as a Bill Forsyth movie, despite much characteristically quirky humour (one glorious parody-pastiche of the *Rififi* robbery). Things start going astray when the boy falls for a hooker. In Forsyth's world, romance is a benevolent fairytale; in John Sayles' script, it takes a back seat as the girl clings to her independence by carrying on hooking. (Casey Siemaszko.)

■ KORCZAK

(Artificial Eye)

Sombre account of the efforts by the Polish champion of children's rights to protect 200 orphans under his care in the Warsaw ghetto. Wojtek Pszoniak makes Korczak a convincingly sharp-witted, abrasive and melancholy figure, struggling for the dignity of his charges even in irreversible defeat, and Andrzej Wajda steers the chilling odyssey carefully clear of obvious opportunities for horror and pathos. The result is a respectfully fatalistic biography filmed by the reliable Robby Müller in appropriate monochrome. (Ewa Dalkowska.)

■ LOVE AT LARGE

(Rank)

Gruff private eye Tom Berenger, a gentle Mike Hammer, is hired

by mystery woman Anne Archer to track a stranger who turns out to be a bigamist. A less-experienced sleuth, Elizabeth Perkins, dogs his tracks, more interested in the detective than his quarry. The case turns into a series of emotional blind alleys; and the gumshoes are drawn together by their shared curiosity, romantic reticence and a tangle of relationships rivalling *The Big Sleep*. Another of Alan Rudolph's delicate, mellow, surprising pictures, with romantic confusion lurking within its generic trenchcoat, and a clutch of exact performances, notably Ted Levine's subtly duplicitous and oddly sincere bigamist, and an array of interesting women, Annette O'Toole and Kate Capshaw as the wives and Anne Magnuson as the hero's fiercely neurotic steady girl.

■ WAITING FOR THE LIGHT

(Entertainment)

Engagingly ramshackle yarn about a rustic café enjoying sudden prosperity when a practical joke is misinterpreted as a miracle and devout customers flock to the doorstep. Set at the fevered time of the Cuban missile crisis, with 'duck and cover' lessons in the schoolroom and fall-out shelters in every backyard, the look of the period is immaculately reconstructed and acquires a mellow splendour through Gabriel Beristain's photography. Slightly overwhelmed by Shirley MacLaine's charismatic presence as a faded showgirl with a taste for cheap music, the plot also takes on a touch too many issues and incidentals, but it's a promising American feature debut for versatile Welsh painter/writer/arts administrator Chris Monger. (Teri Garr, Clancy Brown.)

■ ANOTHER 48 HRS

(UIP)

Eddie Murphy is out of prison and stuck with shaggy cop Nick Nolte. The original was well-crafted if impersonal, the rerun features destruction rather than action, and in-your-face shouting instead of laughs. (Director, Walter Hill.)

■ BAD INFLUENCE

(Entertainment)

Off-key psychological thriller, spun off the same original script as *Apartment Zero*, with cringing yuppie James Spader turning his life around through a friendship with semi-criminal maniac Rob Lowe, and then struggling to get out of the nightmare. Interesting, but fails to follow through. (Director, Curtis Hansen.)

■ BLUE STEEL

(Vestron)

Rookie cop Jamie Lee Curtis, suspended for shooting a supermarket heist-man, finds herself stalked by obsessive stock-dealer who carves names on bullets and murders passers-by. Kathryn Bigelow neatly dovetails Curtis' personal and professional life—daringly suggesting, horror of horrors, that she's a *bad cop*—and stages the *Halloween*-style confrontation with verve. Well

acted, glossily directed, but there's a hollow ring.

■ BYE BYE BLUES

(Artificial Eye)

Anne Wheeler recounts her mother's experiences of making ends meet during the Second World War by performing with a small-time dance band on the Canadian homefront. Sympathetic and evocative, if somewhat unfocused. (Michael Ontkean, Rebecca Jenkins, Luke Reilly.)

■ DARK HABITS

(Metro)

Early Almodóvar item with fugitive torch-singer taking refuge with kinky nuns, and tigers, Tarzan and blackmail stirred into the brew. Funny in flashes, with the usual clever use of sentimental music, but a bit aimless and obvious. (Julietta Serrano, Chus Lampreave, Carmen Maura.)

■ GHOST

(UIP)

Heaven can wait again, without the whimsy, as murder victim Patric Swayze hangs around, desperate and disembodied, to protect the girl he loves from the same killer. A seamless and surprisingly effective blend of horror (the dead have a truly hellish time of it on earth), comedy and romance, it's an engaging first solo feature from Jerry Zucker. (Demi Moore, Whoopi Goldberg.)

■ GREMLINS 2: THE NEW BATCH

(Warner Bros)

Six years on, Joe Dante again festoons a minimal plot—gremlins take over Clamp (read Trump) Tower—with a wealth of bad-taste sight-gags. Good anarchic fun, but the switch from Caprville to Big Apple, and maybe the quest for a '12' certificate, has blunted the original's vicious edge. (Zach Galligan, Phoebe Cates, Christopher Lee.)

■ THE GUARDIAN

(UIP)

Druid nanny Jenny Seagrove sacrifices Christian babies to ancient tree in California: moral-majority family values vs paganism. Trees insufficiently frightening. (Director, William Friedkin.)

■ THE HANDMAID'S TALE

(Virgin)

Margaret Atwood's feminist allegory of subservience, screenplay by Harold Pinter: in a poisoned, puritanical near-future, Natasha Richardson is forced to become a 'handmaid', one of the few women capable of child-bearing; assigned for impregnation to military commander Robert Duvall, she is soon recruited to the underground opposition. Sprawling and lifeless. (Faye Dunaway, Victoria Tennant, Aidan Quinn; director, Volker Schlöndorff.)

■ HOUSE PARTY

(Enterprise)

Pleasant youth musical in which a bad-breath DJ and an eraserhead rapper try to impress girls, enjoy music and get out of

scrapes. Precise social background—one of the few realistic views of non-exaggerated black life in America—and some fine music, but basically a Frankie and Annette movie thirty years on. (Christopher Reid, Christopher Martin; director, Reginald Hudlin.)

■ I LOVE YOU TO DEATH

(Columbia)

An ensemble piece based on a true story in which put-upon wife (Tracey Ullman) tries to murder philandering pizzaman husband (Kevin Kline). Slapstick assassination (à la Rasputin) is fine, but surrounding material doughy and annoying. (Keanu Reeves, William Hurt; director, Lawrence Kasdan.)

■ MEMPHIS BELLE

(Warner Bros)

David Puttnam's hymn to teamwork (a direct reaction to *Top Gun*) follows the crew of a B-17 bomber on their 25th and last mission over Germany in the summer of '43. Engaging acting and soft-pedalled heroics can't disguise the patchwork: a nostalgic anthology of scenes from every other bombing-mission movie ever made. (Matthew Modine, Eric Stoltz; director, Michael Caton-Jones.)

■ NIGHTBREED

(Fox)

Clive Barker's large-scale monster movie follows clash of establishment heavyweights—psychoanalyst David Cronenberg and redneck sheriff Charles Haid—with race of fabulous beings from underground city in the Canadian Northwoods. Impressive creatures, but the story comes and goes and Craig Shaffer is an unpersuasive hero.

■ REPOSSESSED

(Guild)

Inane comedy loosely prompted by Linda Blair's return to *Exorcist* territory: now a demure housewife, she is possessed by a demon relishing the challenge of being exorcised on primetime television. Clunking, but the jokes are just about numerous and irrelevant enough to stifle the groans. (Ned Beatty, Anthony Starke, Lana Schwab; director, Bob Logan.)

■ ROBOCOP 2

(Rank)

Lacklustre rerun, stripped of Paul Verhoeven's panache and sparkle. Between the obligatory scenes of repellent carnage only Dan O'Herlihy makes much progress as the saturnine industrialist bent on mastery of Detroit. (Peter Weller; director, Irving Kershner.)

■ TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

(Virgin)

Four turtles become vigilantes after learning ninjitsu from a radioactive rat in the New York sewers. Appealing premise somewhat spoiled by interchangeability of rubbery heroes, irksome moralising and the BBFC's insistence on snipping martial-arts scenes even in this harmless context. (Director, Steve Barron.)

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